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Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia

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Editor:

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University of Wisconsin-Madison



THE ANNUAL OF URDU STUDIES

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AIMS AND SCOPE: The aim of the *AUS* is to provide scholars working on Urdu humanities in the broadest sense a forum in which to publish scholarly articles, translations, and views. The *AUS* will also publish reviews of books, an annual inventory of significant Western publications in the field, reports, research-in-progress, notices, and information on forthcoming events of interest to its readers (conferences, workshops, competitions, awards, etc.). Each issue of the *AUS* will also include a section in the Urdu script featuring old and new writing.

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A Note on Transliteration

Vowels: *a* *ā* *e* *ē* *i* *ī* *o* *ō* *u* *ū* *ai* *au*

Consonants:

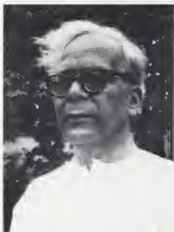
<i>bē</i>	b	<i>dal</i>	d	<i>ḡadd</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡaf</i>	ḡ
<i>pē</i>	p	<i>ḡal</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡadd</i>	ḡ	<i>līm</i>	l
<i>tē</i>	t	<i>ṭal</i>	ṭ	<i>ṭōṭ</i>	ṭ	<i>mīm</i>	m
<i>ṭē</i>	ṭ	<i>rē</i>	r	<i>ṣōṣ</i>	ṣ	<i>nūn</i>	n/h
<i>zē</i>	z	<i>ṣē</i>	ṣ	<i>'ain</i>	'	<i>ad'ā</i>	v
<i>jīm</i>	j	<i>zē</i>	z	<i>ghām</i>	gh	<i>ḥē</i>	ḥ
<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ	<i>ḡē</i>	f	<i>ḡash- mī ḡē</i>	h
<i>ḡē</i>	ḡ	<i>sh</i>	s	<i>ḡaf</i>	q	<i>ḡē</i>	y
<i>khē</i>	kh	<i>shh</i>	sh	<i>ḡaf</i>	k	<i>hamza</i>	'

1. Word-final *h* is indicated only when it is pronounced, e.g., in *nigah*, but not in *qasida*.
2. *Iḡāfar* is indicated by adding *-e* to the first member of such compounds, e.g., *nigab-e ḡashm-e surma-ā*.
3. The Arabic definite article is transliterated *al-* or *T-*, e.g., *ṭīm al-ḡadī* or *ṭīm T-ḡadī*. Note, however, the transliteration of such common words as *biknā* and *allāh*.
4. The *r* of conjunction is written *-o-*.
5. English rules of capitalization will be followed for proper names, titles of books, etc.
6. Urdu words retained in the text are not transliterated and are given in roman if they are listed in *Webster* or in Nigel Hankin's *Hanklyn-Janklyn*. When consulting the latter, it is best to first look up the word in the Index at the back under "Word Required."

in memory of

A L - E *A* H M A D *S* U R O O R

(1911-2002)



AL-E AHMAD SUROOR

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FAHMIDA RIAZ

This Issue of the *Annual*

NOT MUCH TO REPORT, except to record my growing indebtedness to the many well wishers of the *AUS*. First and foremost, thanks to the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS), and especially its current President, Professor Brian Spooner, for its willing and expeditious financial support of the *AUS* in these times of dwindling local institutional assistance.

I'd also like to recognize here, though he would prefer to remain anonymous, my friend Professor Carlo Coppola. In the last decade his professional interests have veered toward administrative work at his home university, but his concern for Urdu Studies has not diminished as a result. If anything, it has grown. Without any prompting by the *AUS*, he has assisted it with financial contributions uninteruptedly for the past five years.

The assistance rendered by Rakhshanda Jalil, Mehr Afshan Farooqi, Christina Osterheld, and Laurel Steele has been more in the nature of writing for the *Annual*, at my request, and often at very short notice. They all have a special claim to my gratitude.

Lastly, one person whose contribution to the *AUS* is less obvious, but without whose unwavering dedication and indomitable strength none of the past four issues would have been possible, is Jane Shum. Words cannot begin to express what all the readers of the *AUS* and I personally owe to her. Poring over closely printed manuscript pages, proofreading again and again, checking the accuracy of footnotes, improving readability, ensuring editorial consistency, managing the *AUS* website, hour after hour, week after week, month after month, often even from home and on weekends, with no thought for adequate compensation, individual credit or public acknowledgement—Jane, your gifts are many and my words are inadequate.

I can now move on, feeling somewhat less burdened. Let me remind everyone that the *AUS* is now available on-line at <http://www.urdustudies.com>. The work of the website has added to the *Annual's* already overtaxed human and financial resources, but the decision to take on this additional work was prompted by the desire to make the *Annual's* contents as widely available as possible. We have placed all the back issues that were published under my editorship in the "Archives" section on the website and also provided a link there to the first

seven volumes edited by Professor C.M. Naim. Please don't hesitate to invite interested Urduwallahs among your friends and acquaintances to visit the *AUS* site. A number of useful items have also been made available under "Resources" and we will continue adding items as time and energy allow. A pictorial bibliography of recent publications about Urdu in Western languages is now being prepared.

While a "Transliteration" guide is regularly included in each issue, those submitting items for publication rarely follow it. This adds greatly to the time required to edit materials, especially when the original Urdu word must even be guessed at. Please add the diacritics indicated in the guide by hand on the paper copy sent and, ideally, also send copies of submissions by e-mail. It would help too if Urdu words were written out in Urdu script in the margins of the paper copy and if photocopies were included for passages in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic.

Finally, it has become quite cumbersome to transliterate and italicize Urdu words retained in the text, especially those that are available either in *Weber's* unabridged dictionary or in Nigel Hankin: *Hanklyn-Janklin*. Starting with this issue we are dispensing with italics and transliteration for the words that are listed in these sources. While consulting *Hanklyn-Janklin* for the meaning of an Urdu word, it is best to look it up first under "Word Required" in the "Index." If the required word is listed there, the right hand column ("Head Word") indicates the entry under which the word should be found. □

M.U.M.

Ghalib's Delhi:
A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at
Two Popular Metaphors*
(for *Ralph Russell*)

MIRZA ASADUL 'I-LAH BEG, better known by his *takhalluq*, Ghālib, was born in Agra in 1797 in a family of soldiers of fortune. His grandfather, Mirzā Qāqān Bēg, had come from Transoxiana to Delhi in the second half of the eighteenth century and obtained a minor rank in the army of Shāh 'Ālam II. Ghālib's father, Mirzā 'Abdul 'I-Lāh Bēg, first soldiered for the Navab of Avadh, then for the Nizam of Hyderabad, and was seeking service with the Raja of Alwar when he was killed in a skirmish in 1802. Ghālib's uncle, Mirzā Naṣru 'I-Lāh Bēg, served the Marathas as the subadar at Agra, but he also developed such useful contacts with the British that Lord Lake, after his conquests of Delhi and Agra in 1803, made him a *risaldar* of 400 cavalymen and also awarded him a jagir for life worth more than one hundred thousand rupees. Naṣru 'I-Lāh Bēg, however, died in 1805 in an accident. Ghālib was then raised by his maternal relatives who had soldiered for the British. In 1810, at the age of thirteen, he was married to an eleven year old, distant relative in Delhi, and soon after moved there, first to live with her family and later on his own. Except for a few short trips to Rampur and an extended absence of almost three years, when he went to Calcutta via Lucknow and Benares, Ghālib remained in Delhi until his death on 15 February 1869.

*Revised. Originally presented at the conference, "Urdu Scholarship in Transnational Perspective," at Columbia University, New York, 28–30 September, 2001.

Urdu literary historiography in the twentieth century has often tended to refer to Ghālib as the last true representative of the "Mughal" intellectual and literary traditions and the Delhi of his experience as a "Mughal" city, briefly resplendent in its old glory before it was destroyed or permanently changed by the British in the aftermath of the Indian Revolt of 1857. With reference to Ghālib's Delhi, it has also been a common habit of our literary historians to employ two particular metaphors in developing their descriptive and analytical statements. According to them, Ghālib's Delhi was a Mughal garden undergoing its final "spring" before the "autumn" of the Revolt's aftermath destroyed it forever, or that it was a Mughal candle that sort of naturally flared into its old brilliance before going out for good. This paper takes a closer look at these two metaphors and their ramifications. It, however, claims only an originality of emphasis as indicated in the title, for what it owes to so many scholars will soon become clear.

Alḡaf Ḥusain Ḥālī (1837-1914), the first chronicler of Ghālib's life, prefaced his book, *Yatagar-e Ghālib* (1897) by evoking a memory of his own first visit to Delhi:

In the thirteenth century of the Muslim era when the decline of the Muslims had already entered its nadir, when along with their wealth, renown and political power there had also departed from them their greatness in arts and sciences, there gathered in Delhi, by some great good fortune, a band of men so talented that their assemblies recalled the days of Akbar and Shahjahan. ... When I first arrived in Delhi autumn had already come to this garden: some of these men had left Delhi while others had departed from this world. Still, among those who had remained, there were many I shall always be proud of having seen—men whose likes the soil of Delhi, nay of all India, will never produce again. For the mould in which they were cast has changed, and the breezes among which they flourished and flowered have veered away. ...¹

¹Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, eds. *Ghālib, 1797-1869. Volume 1: Life and Letters* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 30. In the original, Ḥālī concludes the description by tellingly quoting a Persian verse: "Time has now laid down a very different foundation. The bird that laid golden eggs is no more." The idea for this essay possibly first came to me while reading the above section in that excellent book.

Ḥālī, a native of Panipat, first came to Delhi around 1855 when he was in his late teens, but then stayed less than two years. He, in fact, was not in Delhi but in Hissar when the Revolt broke out in 1857. It, therefore, is interesting to note that in Ḥālī's opinion "autumn had already come" to the garden that recalled for him the days of the Grand Mughals. He also ascribes the preceding "spring" to some stroke of good fortune—lit., "some happy conjunction" [*ḥusn-e ittifaq*]²—rather than to any human cause. Ḥālī's metaphor of a garden suggests an entity with some continuous identity—in this case, Mughal—and a cyclical change: a spring, followed by an autumn, to be followed in turn, one may presume, by another spring. In other words, a metaphor no different from the one that he used in his most influential poetic work, the *musaddas*, "The Tide and Ebb of Islam"—a tide of Islamic glory, followed by a tragic ebb, to be followed, Ḥālī hoped and prayed for, by another tide. But in the case of the Delhi he experienced before 1857 and which alone he identified with Ghālib, Ḥālī apparently perceived no possibility of revival, and made clear his belief by adding the final sentence: "the breezes among which they flourished and flowered have veered away." Many of the twentieth-century Muslim/Urdu intelligentsia, in accord with their own self-perception as a community in socio-political decline and influenced by Indian and Muslim nationalisms, have followed suit, often invoking with reference to Ghālib's times the motif of the last spring in the garden of a supposed Mughal glory.

A later, but equally popular, literary work provided our literary historians the second, and more frequently invoked, metaphor. Written by Mirzā Farḥatū 'l-Lāh Bēg (1884–1947), it is a fictional account of a *mushā'ira* of Urdu poets in Delhi in 1845. Originally titled *Dillī ka Ēk Yādgar Mushā'ira, 1261 Hijri* (A Mushā'ira in Delhi in 1261 A.H.), it is now commonly known—even published—as *Dillī ka Ākhiri Sham* (The Last Candle of Delhi). In his prefatory remarks, Bēg wrote: "It is customary for a sick man to recover, momentarily, before the final stroke of death overtakes him. In the case of Urdu poets the age of the Mughal Emperor Bahādur Shāh II was such a momentary recovery before the final extinction. ... In [his] ruined and desolate city were collected not only poets, but such a host of other talented men that it would be difficult to find their counterparts in the whole of India, nay in the whole world!"

² Akhtar Qumber, *The Last Mushā'irah of Delhi* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979), p. 36.

Bēg's literary tour de force ends with a scene in which the two candles that had earlier circulated among the poets are formally blown out and a herald proclaims that "the last *mushā'ira* of Delhi has come to an end." The "last *mushā'ira*" became in the popular mind the "last candle"—a name reportedly given to the book by Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, a prolific and highly popular writer in the early decades of the last century. It happened perhaps because the new image shared an attribute with the "sick man" image invoked by Bēg, namely that a candle or lamp too, before it finally goes out, flares up, as if in a revival, and casts a brief but brilliant light all around it.

The "candle" metaphor, however, was first invoked and made popular by Maulawī Zakīu 'l-Lāh, a major contemporary of Sir Syed, and an influential teacher and writer whose textbooks on history and arithmetic were extensively used in North Indian schools in the nineteenth century. In his *Tārīkh-e Islāmīyāt-e Hind*, Zakīu 'l-Lāh wrote, "It is the rule that when a lamp is about to go out its wick/flame suddenly flares up. In a similar manner, when the lamp of the Timurid rule was about to go out it gave out so much light and was so revived that it is difficult to find another incident like it."¹ We must note that what was for Zakīu 'l-Lāh "the lamp of the Timurid rule" became for Niẓāmī and others "the candle of Delhi," in fact "the last and final candle of Delhi."

The altered image of a last remaining candle about to go out was not only unambiguous in evoking a finality and doom, it simultaneously implied very strongly that life in the Delhi of the first half of the nineteenth century was not radically different from the days of the great Mughals, that it was illumined not by anything new but only by the last remaining candle of the multitude that had burned bright in the preceding three centuries, and that a radical and wide-ranging change took place only after the Revolt of 1857. The prevalence of this powerful view can be seen in the writings of such popular and prolific writers of the 1930s as Rāshidu 'l-Khairī who wrote *Naubat-e Panj Rūza or Dillī ki Ābbiri Bahār* (The Five Day Glory, or Delhi's Final Spring), Khwāja Muḥammad Shafī who wrote *Dillī ki Sanbhāl* (The Last Recovery of Delhi), and Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī who devoted several short books to this theme, besides any number of their imitators of that time and subsequent who celebrated the final days of the Mughal dynasty in Delhi as the swan song of a pristine

¹As quoted in Tamīm Aḥmad 'Alawī, *Zauq: Sawānif aur Intiqād* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1963), p. 10.

Muslim/Mughal culture in India. With the rise of nationalism in India there developed in the public mind not only a tragic and valiant image of the last occupant of the Red Fort but also a belief that his court actually mattered in the greatly alive social and intellectual life in Delhi preceding the Revolt of 1857, and that only the Revolt's failure brought an end to that way of life and thought and its regal source.⁴

The power and persistence of these two metaphors can perhaps be best illustrated by the fact that even a careful scholar like Shaikh Muḥammad Ikṛām, writing in the late 1940s, casually used both within just three lines to describe the Delhi that Syed Ahmad Khan experienced between 1846 and 1855:

He [Syed Ahmad Khan] saw the final spring of Shahjahanabad. ... The Delhi of the Mughals was at the time like a lamp at dawn, but [as the poet has said,] "*Barakat hai tarāgh-e subh jab khāmūsh hote hai*" [The lamp still burning at dawn flares up before it goes out].⁵

•

"Delhi has been the most glorious—and also the most unfortunate—of all the cities of India," so noted Muhammad Habib, the doyen of modern Muslim historiography in South Asia.⁶ Aurangzēb, the last of the "Great" Mughals, died in 1707. Delhi then was an imperial capital, with a population of close to two million people spread over its various "cities." "It was the largest and most renowned city," writes Percival Spear, "not only of India, but of all the East from Constantinople to Canton. Its court was brilliant, its mosques and colleges numerous, and its literary and artistic fame as high as its political renown."⁷ By 1803, when the British took control of the city from the Marathas, its citizens had been plundered and massacred several times, only one or two of its ten successive emperors had escaped being murdered or blinded, and its status had shrunk to that

⁴Tellingly perhaps, one does not find such claims of cultural authority being made about Bahādur Shāh's predecessor, his father Akbar Shāh II.

⁵Muḥammad Ikṛām, *Mauj-e Kaugar* (Delhi: Maknaba-e Jāmī'a, n.d., reprint of the 2nd edition), p. 80.

⁶Muḥammad Habib, "Preface" in *Shah Valī-i-Lah Dīhlavī ke Siyāt Maktūbat*, ed. Khaliq Ahmad Nizāmi (Lahore: n.p., 1978), p. 13.

⁷Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1969, reprint), p. 1.

of a provincial capital of less than two hundred thousand people.⁹ In the five score years of the eighteenth century, Delhi, indeed the entire North India, had suffered a sea change.

It would, of course, be false to view the eighteenth century as entirely a period of decline and despair for all of India, or even only for North India. As we well know, during that same century several regional political and cultural entities strongly asserted themselves; Delhi's tragic times helped to bring about the glory days of the Deccan, Maharashtra, Bengal and Avadh. Yet the human tragedy of Delhi in the second half of the eighteenth century was indeed immense. The wars between the Turani and Irani factions, the cataclysmic invasion by Nadir Shah, the repeated scourges of the Afghans, the Marathas, the Ruhilas and the Jats—they all took heavy tolls in human lives and also forced much emigration from Delhi and its environs. Then there was the great famine of 1782 in which, according to some estimates, nearly one-third of the rural population of the territory around Delhi starved to death. A relative peace returned to Delhi after some sixty years of despair only in the final decade of the century under the authority of Mahadji Sindhia and his Maratha forces. However, when the British took Delhi they found that "it had been divided into spheres of control by neighbouring Gujar tribes for purposes of plunder."¹⁰

Lord Lake's army defeated the Maratha troops outside Delhi in September 1803. A few weeks later, Lord Wellesley wrote to Shāh 'Ālam and described the victory as "the happy instrument of your Majesty's restoration to a stage of dignity and tranquillity under the power of the British crown."¹¹ The British were now the master of the Mughal and also his protector, but they had no intention of allowing him again any semblance of overlordship. In that regard they were quite different from the Marathas and others before them. Maratha generals, for example, had wielded actual authority in that region for almost thirty years but had claimed merely to be the Regent or Deputy Regent of the Emperor.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires* (Delhi: Oxford University Pr., 1981), p. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Shāh 'Ālam, of course, had an earlier experience of British protection and financial support at Allahabad (1764–1771), after the defeat at Buxar.

The replacement of the Marathas by the British did not alter the actual state of Shāh 'Ālam's authority. The popular anonymous verse, "The 'King of the World,' Shāh 'Ālam, / Rules all the way from Delhi to Palam," would have been a gross exaggeration even if it had actually referred to him, for the ruling powers of the Mughal emperor had for quite some time been limited to the walls of his citadel, the Red Fort.¹¹ Financially, however, he was now better off.

The King's [annual] allowance had at first been fixed at thirteen lakhs [1.3 million rupees] by Sird(h) in 1789, but it had dwindled in later years until his personal allowance was no more than Rs. 17,000 per month, while the whole allowance for the royal household, including the palace guards, was not more than Rs. 45,000 per month. In place of this Shāh 'Ālam's personal allowance was fixed [by Wellesley] at Rs. 60,000 per month, and the whole grant at eleven and a half lakhs a year.¹²

Shāh 'Ālam was an old and frugal man: when he died in 1806 he had accumulated five lakhs in the royal treasury. But his successors had more expenses to take care of, primarily because now, under *Pax Britannica*, they had many more dependents to support. When Bahādur Shāh II came to the throne in 1837, there were roughly 800 *salāṭin* or royal descendants dependent on him; by 1848, this number had increased to around 2,100. The British, however, never gave the Mughal more than Rs. 12 lakhs [1.2 million] in any given year.

We may briefly note here an interesting parallel. Ghālib's uncle had been given a substantial jagir by the British, which they took back when he died only a year later. Small pensions, however, were arranged for his dependents—Ghālib's share being Rs. 62 and 8 annas per month. As Peter Hardy has aptly put it, "[Ghālib] accepted without difficulty that the British owed him a living as a young relative of Muslim collaborators with the British, collaborators who had acted as sincere partners and allies, albeit junior, in a common enterprise, men who were neither sycophants

¹¹ *Sajjās-e Shāh-e 'Ālam // Az Dillī az Palām* "This anonymous verse, now generally assumed to refer to the eighteenth century Mughal king, goes back, in fact, a couple of centuries more. In its original form, "*Bādshāh-e 'Ālam // Az Dillī az Palām*," it referred to 'Ālam Shāh, the last of the Sayyid kings of Delhi. See 'Abdul Ḳādir, *Tārīkh-e Dillī* (ed. Shaikh 'Abdu 'l-Rashid [Aligarh: Shu' bah-i Tārīkh-i Muslim Yunivārsitī-i Aligarh, 1969]), p. 7.

¹² Spear, p. 38.

nor time-servers."¹³ Ghālīb received that amount in full only until 1827; after 1827, thanks mainly to the antagonism of his own relatives, he had to struggle hard to get his due share. He went to Calcutta, petitioned the Governor General and the Queen, and would have carried his case to England if he had had the means.

Shāh 'Ālam's successor, Akbar Shāh II, also sought to obtain what he thought was his just due. In 1827 he petitioned the Directors of the East India Company and managed to get his allowance increased to Rs. 15 lakhs, but "the increase was never actually paid at all."¹⁴ After Akbar Shāh's death in 1837, his son Bahādur Shāh II, who owed his accession to the throne entirely to the British invention of a false Mughal tradition of primogeniture—Akbar Shāh had preferred a younger son, and the Mughal throne had always been fought over and won through bloodshed—tried several times to negotiate an increase, but always in vain. Neither Ghālīb nor the Mughal emperor was any match to the formidable intricacies of the British bureaucracy. The system of administration and authority that assured the two their security and regular income, also made it impossible for them to receive with grace what they believed was theirs by right as well as promise. It also placed the king and the commoner on an unprecedented equal footing.

As already mentioned, Ghālīb grew up in Agra but had moved to Delhi by the time he was fifteen. He thus lived all his life knowing no temporal authority other than the British. He also watched Delhi gradually gain in prosperity and population, and saw the walled city and its un-walled sprawl become more secure, "[under] the judicial powers of the Resident, fortified by the contingents of the army in and near the city, [protecting it] from raids by the Gujars and Mewatis."¹⁵ In 1821, the British restored the old city canal—originally built in the 14th century by Firōz Tughlaq and repaired and enlarged by Shāhjahān in the 17th—that had been in disrepair and clogged with sand since the 1750s. When water was directed into the channel that fed the canal in the Chandni Chowk, the people "greeted the flowing water with offerings of ghee and

¹³Peter Hardy, "Ghālīb and the British," in *Ghālīb: The Poet and His Age*, ed. Ralph Russell (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 56–7.

¹⁴Spear, p. 38.

¹⁵Gupta, p. 11.

flowers."¹⁶ Ghālib must have also seen the immediate environs of Delhi turn lush and green as old gardens were repaired and new ones planted.

More importantly, Ghālib witnessed something that had not taken place in Delhi for centuries: peaceful transfers of authority, not just in the Fort involving puppet kings, but also in the British administration that wielded enormous visible power. In 1829, Edward Colebrooke, Resident at Delhi, was first suspended then later dismissed from service on charges of corruption. It must have amazed the people of Delhi to see their virtual king removed without any breakdown of authority. In 1833, when the incumbent Lt. Governor passed away, Ghālib wrote to his friend, Munshi Nabi Bakhsh Haqir, "The Lt. Governor died in Bareilly. Let's see who is appointed in his place. Just see how [good] the administration of these people is. What tumult [*inḡāḡāḡ*] wouldn't have occurred if any similar high ranking person of Hindustan had passed away? But here no one shows even the slightest concern as to what happened and who died."¹⁷ No wonder then that Ghālib, in the Persian poem that he wrote in 1833 for Syed Ahmad Khan's edition of Abul 'Alī-Faḡl's *Ā'in-e Akhḡar* and that Syed Ahmad Khan did not include, not only praised such Western inventions as the telegraph and the steam engine, but also declared that the law of the realm [*ā'in*] that existed in his own time had not been seen before, and that it had made all preceding *ā'in*s as useless as old almanacs! He closed the poem by resoundingly declaring: "It's not virtuous to nurture and cherish the dead" [*murda parwardan muḡḡrak kār nist*],¹⁸ a sentiment also echoed in one of his best-known Persian couplets: "*bā man miḡdēt ai pīdar, farzand-e Azar-rā nigār // bar kas ki shud pāhib-naḡar dīn-e buzwargān khush na-kand*" (Don't quarrel with me, Father; look at Azar's son Abraham. For he who gains a discerning eye doesn't favor his ancestors' faith).

Ghālib, of course, was a descendent of mercenary soldiers and belonged to the current urban aristocracy; he did not know how excessive taxes and rigid tenancy regulations introduced by the British had set in

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19. Gupta adds, "But the farmers in Delhi Territory used up so much of it that the quantity flowing into the city decreased and the Canal finally dried up again [in the 1840s]."

¹⁷Ghālib, *Khuzāt-e Ghālib*, ed. Malik Rām (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdu, 1962), p. 232.

¹⁸Text in Waris Kirmani, *Evaluation of Ghālib's Persian Poetry* (Aligarh: Dept. of Persian, Aligarh Muslim University, 1972), pp. 72–4.

process the ruination of the peasantry in Delhi territory.¹⁹ Nor was he much aware of the fact that procedural equality between the Europeans and the Indians was limited to civil cases, and that the Europeans were considered superior to Indians under the criminal law.²⁰

Turning to the matter of the cultural and religious life of Delhi during the first half of the nineteenth century, we should note that the presence of the Emperor was felt in the city only on those occasions that involved some public pomp and display. The Emperor's elephants paraded through the city in festive processions, and ceremonial *durbars* were regularly held in the Red Fort. It is also true that the people of the pre-Revolt Delhi did not imitate the British in dress, food, and social behavior, and no doubt the etiquette of the royal court was emulated in all elite assemblies in the city, as it was in many similar gatherings all over India. But at no time was the Emperor in any sense an arbiter of the elite's taste and behavior. Similarly, the Emperor regularly took part in the two annual Eid gatherings in the Jama Masjid, and his name was mentioned in the Friday *khutbas* in Delhi as well as elsewhere. His symbolic position as the champion of the Sunni faith also remained important, to the extent that Bahādur Shāh II had to conceal his own Shi'ite leanings.²¹ The Emperor also patronized Hindu festivals and religious processions. But that is all that we can claim concerning the Mughal Emperor's significance in the religious life of the people of Delhi.

There was, on the other hand, a major new development in the religious life of Delhi during the first half of the nineteenth century, and that was the establishment of a Christian presence within the walled city and an expansion of Christian missionary work. Though the skyline of Delhi was still dominated by the domes and minarets of the Jama Masjid, there was now another prominent enough building not too far from it,

¹⁹Spear, p. 108 ff.

²⁰Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 16. Needless to say, Ghālib has no word of praise for the new law and order in the verses and comments on his own confinement for three months on charges of running a gambling den.

²¹In fact, on one occasion, Bahādur Shāh sought Ghālib's help for exactly that purpose, and Ghālib, staunchly a Shi'a in his own beliefs, came to his patron's rescue.

namely St. James's Church, built inside the city by Col. James Skinner and consecrated in 1836. There were also instances of conversion, including at least three major cases, those of (1) Dr. Chimman Lal, who was in the British medical service and attended upon the Emperor too; (2) "Master" Ram Chandra, a mathematician, who was a highly respected and popular teacher at Delhi College; and (3) Maulavi Imaduddin, who came to be known as *Piṭr* Imaduddin and was later a most active Christian polemicist. According to Percival Spear, both Chimman Lal and Ram Chandra, who received baptism together in July 1852, "were first attracted to Christianity as something more than an intellectual creed by the services in St. James's Church."²² According to some scholars, at least Naṭir Aḥmad, the well-known novelist and translator, if not also Zakā'u'l-Lāh, the first modern Muslim historian, came close to converting to Christianity, the religion chosen by the two's beloved teacher "Master" Ram Chandra.²³ Though the full effects of the missions were felt much later when the whole of North India saw heated polemics and public debates between Christian clerics and Muslim ulama, it may be more than a mere speculation on the part of Professor Annemarie Schimmel that the first Urdu translations of the Qur'ān by the two younger sons of Shāh Valī 'l-Lāh could have been in response to the translation activities of the Christian missionaries.²⁴

²²Spear, p. 144. Also, Ṣādiq 'r-Raḥmān Qāḍī, *Maṣṣar Rām Candar* (Delhi: Shu'ba-e Urdū, Delhi University, 1961) p. 41, based on Ram Chandra's own statement in the preface to his magnum opus, *A Treatise on the Problems of Maxima and Minima* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1859).

²³Qāḍī, p. 491. C.F. Andrews, *Zaka Ullah of Delhi* (Lahore: Universal Books, 1976, reprint), p. 68. One should also note the presence of several very positive Christian missionary figures in a number of Naṭir Aḥmad's novels. Ghālib, incidentally, is not reported to have had any dealings with Christian missionaries.

²⁴Annemarie Schimmel, *Classical Urdu Literature From the Beginning to Iqbal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), p. 205. Shāh Raḥīf 'd-Dīn's translation was completed in 1786, while the more popular translation by Shāh 'Abdu'l-Qāḍir was finished in 1792. S.A.A. Rizvi, in *Shah 'Abd Al-'Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Pub., 1982), disagrees with Schimmel, arguing that the translations were done earlier than any known spread of the missionaries' work and traces in the Delhi territory (p. 104). Shāh Valī 'l-Lāh's own Persian translation of the Qur'ān, perhaps the first in South Asia, was due to his own independent desire to have ordinary literate Muslims of his time

While the people of pre-Revolt Delhi did not imitate the British table manners and social behavior, many of them were quite enthusiastic about Western sciences. The city did not lack in *madrasas* where traditional Islamic learning was available, but none gained the status and fame that accrued to the one which eventually came to be known as Delhi College. In 1825, the East India Company took over an existing *madrasa* which, in 1824, had only nine students and just one teacher.²⁵ The new institution began with a staff of several Indian teachers and an English principal, but with a monthly budget of only Rs. 500. It received a major boost when, a couple of years later, the Prime Minister of the King of Avadh left it a bequest of Rs. 170,000. At first the College had classes only in "Oriental" languages but in 1828 an English section was also opened which, within three years, could boast of 300 students. What was most significant about this institution was that it taught Western sciences to *all* its students, and that too through the medium of Urdu. Complementing the College's work were the efforts of the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society which did an outstanding job of getting scholarly books translated into Urdu from Arabic, Persian and English for use at the College. Maulavi 'Abdu 'I-Haq, in his book on Delhi College, has given a list of some 128 books—original works as well as translations—that the Society published, including books on geometry, algebra, astronomy, physics, chemistry, calculus, geography, history and mechanics, translated by the teachers and former students of the College. By 1855, Delhi College had a total of 350 students; of these, 217 were in the English language section, while the three "Oriental" languages, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, had 77, 33 and 23 students, respectively.²⁶

Some sense of that heady time for the then young of age can be had from two quotations from C. F. Andrews' chapter on "The New Learning" in his book on Zakat'u 'I-Lah. He quotes from "Master" Ram Chandra's memoirs as follows:

directly engage with their scripture, and similar could have been the desire later of his sons too. The issue deserves further exploration.

²⁵'Abdu 'I-Haq, *Masnam Durr-i-Kutub* (Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, Hirqi, 1943). All comments concerning Delhi College are based on the information provided by Maulavi 'Abdu 'I-Haq. One should remember that similar institutions were also started at Agra and Benares, though detailed information about them has not been put together yet.

²⁶By religion, 243 Hindus, 97 Muslims, and 10 Christians.

The doctrines of ancient philosophy taught through the medium of Arabic were thus cast in the shade before the more reasonable and experimental theories of modern science. The old dogma, for instance, that the earth is the fixed centre of the Universe, was generally laughed at by the higher students of the Oriental, as well as by those of the English Department of the Delhi College. But the learned men, who lived in the city, did not like this innovation on their much-loved theories of the ancient Greek Philosophy, which had been cultivated among them for many centuries past.²⁷

Later, Andrews recalls what Zakā'u'l-Lāh had told him. "Munshi Zaka Ullah, in his old age, used to tell me with kindling eyes, how eagerly these scientific lectures were followed, and how, after each lecture, the notes used to be studied, over and over again, and copied out by many hands."²⁸

According to Šadiqu 'r-Rahmān Qidvā'i, the college used to advertise public talks or demonstrations related to physical sciences in the city.²⁹ It is quite possible that Ghālib, who had an inquisitive mind and remained curious all his life, heard details of these events from his friends if he did not actually attend any of them. He knew the Principal of the College fairly well. He also knew "Master" Ram Chandra, and considered him a dear friend; the latter, on his part, brought Ghālib much comfort in those terrible months after the British recaptured Delhi when Ghālib's non-Muslim friends alone could visit him. Much later, when the Commissioner of Delhi organized a scholarly association named the Delhi Society in 1865, Ghālib, despite his old age, responded to the Society's invitation and attended its second meeting on 11 August 1865. He sat through two papers, one on the Mahajani system in India by the Society's vice-president, Lala Sahib Singh, and the second on the benefits of studying history by Munshi Jivan Lal. He then himself read a short note—seated in his chair for he could not stand for long—on the destruction of the city and the hard times that followed.³⁰

²⁷As quoted in Andrews, pp. 39–40.

²⁸Andrews, p. 42.

²⁹Qidvā'i, p. 18.

³⁰Abdu 's-Sattār Šiddīqī, "Dihlī Sūz-i'ī āur Mirzā Ghālib," in *Aligarh Magazine, Ghālib Number* (Urdu), 24:2 (1948–49), pp. 57–60.

Two major Muslim scholars of the time, Maulavi Mamlūk 'Alī and Maulavi Imām Baksh Shāhī, taught at the College, while Mufti Šadru 'd-Dīn Āzard, another prominent Muslim scholar, was one of its Honorary Examiners. All three were close friends of Ghālib. As for any lasting influence of the College, we need only recall that among its alumni were such future luminaries as Naẓir Aḥmad, the novelist, Zakīl 'l-Lāh, the historian, and Muḥammad Husain Āzād, the literary critic, essayist and one of the founders of the "New Poetry" movement in Urdu. The great seminal figure, Syed Ahmad Khan, was too senior to have been a student at the College, but when he was the Munsif in Delhi (1846-1855) he informally studied with Maulavi Mamlūk 'Alī and was quite familiar with the work of the College and the Translation Society, as is evident in his own efforts later to produce scientific literature in Urdu on similar lines. It will be no exaggeration to say that what C. F. Andrews tentatively referred to as "the Delhi Renaissance" was much more due to the Delhi College than to any other institution.³¹ Except, of course, the printing press and Urdu newspapers.

One wonders what could have been the state of general literacy and education in South Asia today if either Akbar or Jahāngīr had ordered a few printing presses from Europe and had them set up in Agra and Delhi, if only for their own and their nobles' use. The two emperors were shown printed books and engraved pictures by their European visitors—as were the nobles—but strangely enough neither the emperors nor the nobles showed any interest in the revolutionary new process of producing books. One reason may have been the lack of a "Protestant" spirit in Indian Islam at that time. That spirit or something like it, in my tentative opinion, appeared in Delhi only in the early decades of the nineteenth century. I find it significant that when Shāh 'Abdu 'l-Qādir and Shāh Raft'u 'd-Dīn published their translations of the Qur'ān they felt no obligation to add commentaries; they apparently considered their literate co-religionists—men and women—capable of making sense of their common faith by accessing its scripture through Urdu, a language considered too commonplace and unworthy for such purposes only a few years earlier. We get some sense of the reach and influence of these translations in Syed Ahmad Khan's note on Shāh 'Abdu 'l-'Azīz where he decries a habit among the people of his own time [i.e., the 1840s]:

³¹ Andrews, p. 40.

[At present] every commoner [ʿāmm] believes himself to be scholar [ʿālim] and every ignoramus regards himself as a learned man. Merely on the basis of having read a few chapbooks on religious issues and a translation of the Qurʾān, and that too in Urdu, with some ordinary teacher [aʿlīm] or just through his own effort, he considers himself a jurist and an exegete and dares to preach and opine on issues. This bane of our time that has spread like a plague over all Hindustān, but in particular in Shāhjahānābād ... was not present during [Shāh ʿAbdu'l-ʿAzīz's] time.³²

That spirit of inquiry and that confidence in affirming one's faith even in the face of opposing traditions, I believe, became only stronger after the Revolt, when lay Muslims like Syed Ahmad Khan and Naẓir Ahmad, felt no hesitancy in translating and commenting on the Qurʾān in Urdu in the light of their own understanding and experience, and when Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad of Qadīyan began to publish his own visionary/sectarian writings within the rubric of Islam.

The first printing press in India was set up in 1550 by the Portuguese, and the earliest printed book now extant in any Indian language is said to be a copy of the second edition of a "Malabar Tamil" prayer book published in 1559.³³ As for Persian and Urdu, we must wait till the beginning of the nineteenth century, when books in these languages were published in Calcutta under the auspices of the College of Fort William. It was also in Calcutta that the first Urdu and Persian newspaper appeared in the 1820s. But the true spread of the Urdu press occurred only after the newly discovered technology of litho printing reached India. It was much less expensive, and, more significantly, it could also immediately use the professional calligraphers already available everywhere, thus retaining the aesthetic quality of manuscripts. By 1840, there were Urdu presses and newspapers all over North India, often more than one in major cities. The first important Urdu newspaper in Delhi was a weekly, *Dihlī Akbār*, later *Dihlī Urdu Akbār*, which was started in 1837; its first editor was Maulavī Muḥammad Akbar, the father of Maulavī Muḥammad Bāqir and the

³²Syed Ahmad Khan, *Āṣṭra-y-Samāʿiyya*, ed. Khaliq Anjum (New Delhi: Urdu Akadmi, 1990), vol. II, p. 96.

³³Nadir ʿAlī Khān, *Hindustani Press 1556 to 1900* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Akadmi, 1990), p. 16.

grandfather of Muhammad Husain Āzād.³⁴ The next important Urdu press and weekly—*Saiyadu'l-Akhbār*—were started in 1841 by Syed Ahmad Khan's brother, Syed Muhammad Khan, who published the first editions of Ghālib's Urdu *Dīwān* and Syed Ahmad Khan's *Āṣār-u-Sanādīd*. Between 1837 and 1857, there were at least five weeklies, two bi-monthlies, and one monthly in Urdu that were published from Delhi for varying lengths of time, including two important journals published by "Master" Ram Chandra whose role in the spread of modern learning among the élite of Delhi, both Muslim and Hindu, is yet to be fully understood.³⁵ There were of course many other newspapers that came into Delhi from other cities and were quoted by local journals.

What is important for us to note is that (1) several of the people involved in these endeavors also had ties with the Delhi College; (2) that these newspapers regularly carried not only news but also informative articles on a wide range of subjects; and (3) that the period between 1835 and 1857 was also the time when the press in British India was relatively most free of governmental control or censorship. Ghālib himself was an avid reader of newspapers; he was also a natural pamphleteer, as became evident in the controversy that raged around *Burhān-e Qāfi*. Ghālib enjoyed and exploited the benefits of printing as no Urdu poet before him could have conceived of. It may be fair to believe that he, thereby, rapidly reached an audience markedly different in number and kind from what would have been the case otherwise.

It is important to underscore the fact that neither the aged Emperor nor any member of his household was in any way involved with either the Delhi College or the various presses and newspapers in the city. No doubt, the Fort had its own Persian weekly, but it was merely a chronicle of the King's daily activities. Bahādur Shāh II did not patronize any scholarly work. Even the unfinished history of the Mughal dynasty that he asked Ghālib to compose in 1830—for which Ghālib received three sonorous titles and a monthly stipend of Rs. 50—was no more than an exercise in Persian composition. The contrast becomes the more acute when we note that, around the same time and in the same city of Delhi, Henry Eliot could prepare the many volumes of his contentious *History of India*

³⁴Nādir 'Alī Khān, *Urdu Shāhīn ki Tārīkh* (Aligarh: Ejūkashanal Buk Hī'ūs, 1987), pp. 75, 83. My comments on the Urdu press are based on the above two excellent books by Nādir 'Alī Khān.

³⁵Qidwā'i, pp. 148–67.

as *Told by its Historians* by exploiting the personal library of Navāb Zayn al-Dīn Khān, an intimate friend of Ghālīb's, and that the Vernacular Translation Society published Urdu translations of histories of England, Rome, Greece and Iran, even a world history.³⁶

In presenting these details, my purpose has been to underscore the reality that Ghālīb's Delhi (i.e., the Delhi that Hālī mourned) was not the Delhi of Akbar and Shāhjahān—in fact it was not even the Delhi of Muḥammad Shāh and Shāh 'Ālam. There was more prosperity and security in Delhi itself by the 1830s than the city had experienced at any time in the preceding one hundred years. More importantly, there were also many new ideas and institutions and several new technologies, whose impact was gradually being felt by an increasing number of people, particularly in urban centers such as Delhi. Ghālīb, unlike any other writer of his generation, shows an awareness of these developments in his writings. This is not to suggest that Ghālīb was a product of his times, or that his poetry was inspired by the ideas taught at Delhi College. To dispel any such misconception we need only to recall that Ghālīb had completed most of his Urdu *Dīwān* by 1816, when he was only nineteen years old! In fact, between 1820 and 1830, Ghālīb turned his back on Urdu and the Urdu poets of Delhi and wrote almost exclusively in Persian. His Persian and Urdu ghazals, however, share a common questioning mind boldly engaging itself with the imponderables of human existence.

To sum up, while making any attempt to obtain a sense of what Ghālīb's Delhi was like, we should at least bear the following in mind.

(1) Delhi indeed enjoyed in the pre-Revolt decades what later came to be called the "English Peace," and it rapidly became a vigorous, urban, consumer society, attracting to itself money and people once again. What that *Pax Britannica* did to the rural society and to various indigenous industries is another matter. These things, however, did not concern Ghālīb—his worries were limited to his pension and his friends—and his peers.

(2) The people in the Red Fort, including the Emperor, had scarce resources and also limited interests. One finds little evidence of any creative energy in them. No doubt, the pathetic end of Bahādur Shāh II

³⁶The surprising ease with which Hālī refers to Greek and Hindu philosophers and legends in his various essays could have come only from his familiarity with the publications of the College. The same may be said for his interest in political economy.

arouses our sympathy, which we then extend to the Fort and what it stands for now in general estimate. But we can do better by noting what Maulavi Zakā'u'l-Lāh told C. F. Andrews on that subject:

I knew Old Delhi. I also knew well the Royal Palace; for I went there as a boy. I know what happened there better, perhaps, than anyone who is alive today. For almost everyone is now dead who could remember it, as I could, by personal experience of what it meant. All I can say about it is this, that the present with all its glaring faults is better than that which I knew when I was a boy. People speak of the "good old times"; but those times, as a whole, were not good, when they are compared with the days in which we are now living. They were full of corruption and decay.²⁷

(3) It is indeed amazing to find in Delhi in the first half of the nineteenth century such an array of distinguished people: Shāh 'Abdu'l-'Azīz, Shāh 'Abdu'l-Qādir, Maulavi Mamlūk Ali, 'Allāma Faḡl-e Haq Khairābādī, Azādū'l-Lāh Khān Ghālib, Mōmin Khān Mōmin, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Zauq, Maulavi Imām Bakhsh Ṣabbā'ī, Muftā Ṣadru'd-Dīn Āzurda, Navāb Muḡaffā Khān Shāfi'a, "Master" Ram Chandra, and Syed Ahmad Khan. It was the new sense of security which made that gathering possible; otherwise, as had happened in the second half of the preceding century, some of them might not have come to Delhi, while some others would have emigrated from there. Of the above, Ṣabbā'ī, Mamlūk Ali and Ram Chandra taught at the Delhi College; Āzurda and Faḡl-e Haq served in the British administration, as did Faḡl-e Haq's father and Syed Ahmad Khan; Mōmin, like Ghālib, received a pension from the British, while Shāfi'a owed his estate entirely to the new rulers. Only Zauq and the two religious teachers, Shāh 'Abdu'l-'Azīz and Shāh 'Abdu'l-Qādir, did not receive any sustained patronage from the British. We may however note that Shāh 'Abdu'l-'Azīz, by petitioning the British, did manage to get back in 1807 a large land grant that he had unfairly lost, twenty years earlier, to a widow of the Emperor Muḥammad Shāh.²⁸

²⁷ Andrews, p. 19. Also supported by scattered reports in different newspapers of that time.

²⁸ S.A.A. Rizvi, "Shah Abdul Aziz's Madad-i Ma'ash in Delhi, and the British," in *Islamic Society and Culture*, ed. M. Ismail & N.K. Wagle (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), pp. 135-47. In *Āṣṭra-Ṣanādīd*, first edition, Syed Ahmad Khan listed a few other notable persons who were in the British service, namely Ḥakīm

(4) We should also be clear in our minds about the so-called "Delhi Renaissance," which is now generally believed to have come to a sad end in 1857. If it refers merely to the simultaneous presence in Delhi of the above-named luminaries, we must note that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, they were already fast disappearing due to natural causes. If, on the other hand, our concern is with ideas and scholarship, we may wish to make some further distinctions:

(a) So far as traditional Islamic learning is concerned, none of the above made any original contribution, though the legal opinions of Shāh 'Abdu 'l-'Azīz concerning English education and employment with the British and the Urdu translations of the Qur'ān by his brothers can be said to have had significant impact on educated Muslims. A far more significant revival and enhancement of the traditional branches of Islamic learning had already taken place earlier—in the eighteenth century—at the hands of Shāh Valu 'l-Lāh in Delhi and Mullā Nizām 'd-Dīn Sihābt in Lucknow.

(b) In the area of Urdu literature, Ghālīb, of course, towered above all his contemporaries, but he continued to be productive after the Revolt, particularly in the form of Urdu letters to his numerous admirers. The publication of these letters in 1868 no doubt played some role in the development of modern Urdu prose. Zauq and Māmin died before 1857. They were competent poets but not of the same rank as Ghālīb—they get mentioned now because they were Ghālīb's peers. Likewise Āzardā, Šahbā'ī and Shāfi'a are remembered today merely because they were Ghālīb's friends. The second seminal figure, besides Ghālīb, is Syed Ahmad Khan, but his greatest achievements come after 1857. We should also bear in mind that, between 1800 and 1850, notable contributions to Urdu literature were also made elsewhere, e.g., in Lucknow by the great *marjūya* writers, and in Calcutta by the munshis working under the direction of John Gilchrist at the College of Fort William.

(c) In the domain of scientific thought and education, we see that Delhi College played the crucial role. The College and the Vernacular Translation Society produced an impressive number of scholarly books in Urdu, and thus made available both the "Oriental" and the Western learned traditions to a large audience. As mentioned earlier, at the College even the students specializing in Arabic and Sanskrit were required to

study mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, and history. They learned new ways to think. Delhi College was too modest a place to produce research scientists—though "Master" Ram Chandra, who first studied and later taught there, was perhaps the first modern mathematician of India—but it contributed immensely to the development of a new intellectual discourse among the people of Delhi. To return to the popular metaphor of a "garden," it may be rightly asserted that Delhi College—as also the colleges at Agra and Benares—did the work of planting and seeding, and that the plants that came up were *not* knocked down by the hot wind of the Revolt, though the College itself was, first through the wanton destruction by Indian soldiers and local hooligans, and then by the deliberate neglect of some British officers and the increasing importance of Lahore as an educational center. Those plants, so far as the Muslims and Urdu are concerned, in fact grew into giant trees and bore much fruit in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the writings of Nazir Ahmad, Zakariya 'I-Lah, Muhammad Husain Azad, and Piyar-e Lal Ashob. Though not alumni themselves, both Syed Ahmad Khan and Altaf Husain Halli were familiar with the work done at the College, and can confidently be said to have been influenced by it. In other words, the "Renaissance" initiated by the College did not end with it, it gathered greater strength with time, and its arena expanded to include all of North India.

But there also happened certain qualitative shifts soon after the Revolt which deserve to be noticed.

First, the "Renaissance" was no longer definable exclusively in terms of a language, Urdu, or a place, Delhi. It rapidly took on a communal—i.e., Muslim—identity, as its surviving luminaries and new stalwarts devoted themselves to the cause of the two major Muslim groups which had directly been effected by the aftermath of the Revolt. Recalling an older phrase, the two may be best identified as the "men of sword" [*shihān-e saif*] and the "men of pen," [*shihān-e qalam*], who together formed the majority of those who as a whole were called the *shurafā'*. The first group suffered rapid decline with the expansion of the aforementioned *Pax Britannica*, while the second group lost ground slowly and due to many factors: the rise in the use of English, and later of regional languages, in administrative work; the linking of jobs with educational qualifications as against the earlier importance of family and heritage; the relatively more rapid educational progress of the numerically larger similar Hindu groups; and the earlier such advance made by Bengali Hindus who now began to be present all over North India in various

professional and administrative roles. The new élite Muslim identity soon became the old reform movement's dominant defining feature, and as such became enmeshed in time with issues of political power and nation-hood. I may add that, since its umbilical tie with Urdu was not cut, other languages spoken by millions of Muslims in India, such as Bengali, Sindhi and Punjabi, were marginalized in the overwhelming perspective adopted by Muslim leaders seeking social and political resurgence.

Secondly, the earlier urge for scientific learning in its own right was replaced after the Revolt with a greater concern for the economic uplift of the "salaried" classes among the Muslims, as is evident in the writings identified with the so-called Aligarh Movement. As a result, Urdu too eventually got marginalized in favor of English—the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Syed Ahmad Khan did not make Urdu its medium of instruction, as had been the case at the Delhi College. The pursuit of scientific knowledge through the medium of Urdu was taken up again only in the second decade of the next century and only at the Osmania University at Hyderabad.

To conclude, it may perhaps be more accurate to say that experientially there had really been two Delhis for Ghālib, one of the time before May 1857 and the other of after October 1857, the two separated by the traumatic days of the Revolt and its brutal aftermath. Hālī, a person of humbler means and rank than Ghālib and living in Panipat, never fully experienced the former, and later made sense of what little he had seen in terms of the feelings evoked in him by the early days of the latter. That "first" Delhi of Ghālib's experience was not the final gasp of a "candle" which briefly lit up its surroundings, allegedly with its original Mughal brilliance. The "candle" was neither of Mughal make, nor did it die out with the Mutiny; it was something new, a product of Indo-British collaboration, and though it sputtered greatly in 1857, it continued to burn and give light. Nor was it a "garden" that had already seen its spring and was then fully destroyed during the Revolt. If anything, it was "a garden yet to be fully created," and Ghālib was its "nightingale," singing away, "warmed by the ecstasy of Imagination."²⁸ The Delhi of the first half of the nineteenth century was an exciting and wonderful place for those who experienced it, particularly the intelligentsia, because it contained some-

²⁸Ghālib's Urdu verse: *bah garut-e nashā-e sapavār it naghma-sarj // main 'andāz-e gulshan-e nā-afzāda hūn* (I sing away, warmed by the ecstasy of Imagination; I'm the nightingale of a garden not yet created).

thing new and vital and was perceived by many as the harbinger of a future markedly different from its past, and not because it displayed some revived past as so many later Urdu writers, confusing the citadel with the city and overwhelmed by the rising tide of political and cultural nationalism in the country, convinced themselves to believe.

In 1969, Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam wrote, "... Mughal culture and English culture met in [the fifty years before the Revolt] on terms of mutual respect. This situation was ended by the upheaval of 1857 and is only now, a century later, again being generally restored."⁶⁰ If that restoration has progressed—and I believe that it has—and if that restoration was worth the effort—and I strongly believe that it was—then a further important step has now become incumbent upon us. Since Benedict Andersen's *Imagined Communities*, we have learned to think twice about our convenient, all-purpose imperatives of nationhood and nationalism. Now, in a similar manner, we need to be more thoughtful about the complex, often quite paradoxical, role that colonial rule played in the lives of the different sections of the Indian people at different times. An important ancillary to that process would be an effort on the part of Urdu scholars to recover the life of the mind of that Urdu intelligentsia of long ago—Hindu, Muslim and Christian—who found excitement, and discovered new and creative ways to define and express themselves, in that initial sustained encounter with what eventually became an oppressive colonial rule. A half century after that rule's end, we need to undertake this task just as much for our own sake as for the sake of those remarkable people of long ago. We may be right to reject the history books of the mature Zakāu 'l-Lāh as uncritical paeans to the British rule, but we will be missing out on something precious, not only in him but in ourselves, if we fail to understand the boy Zakāu 'l-Lāh who could have come running home, all excited, his head buzzing with new ideas. □

*River of Fire: Critiquing the
Ideology of History*
(Student Paper)

I

THE PAINFUL TENSION between the personal and the historical has always been a key theme attracting poets. However, Qurratulain Hyder, in her "historical novel" *River of Fire*, takes up this relatively common theme in such a way that her treatment of it produces a strong critique of the received notion of history. In other words, the author of *River of Fire* depicts the, at once, tragic and comic drama which takes place between the historical and the personal. Hyder's artistic representation of that drama epistemologically questions what is known as history. This paper seeks to explore the ways in which this novel works *against*, *parallel to* and as a *supplement to* history. I use the term "history" here with two distinct meanings. Sudipta Kaviraj defines history as firstly meaning "the course of happenings in time, the seamless web of experiences of a people," and secondly as meaning "the stories in which what had happened are recovered and explained."¹ In this discussion I will read *River of Fire* against both of these definitions. However, for greater clarity, I will use the term "history" to convey the first meaning and "historiography" to convey the second.

II

In the world of this novel, princes leave their thrones and their beautiful

¹Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness* (Delhi: Oxford University Pr., 1995), p. 107.

women, preferring intellectual pursuits over ruling countries and waging wars. Despite dwelling under trees and only eating meager foods, students live happy lives reflecting on the cosmos and ultimate truths. They're looking for a fine line to walk in a world where every question has six correct answers. In this world, one finds renunciators, intellectuals, men of letters, painters and traders. *River of Fire* opens this spectacular world before our eyes. Apart from the wonderful men, and perhaps more importantly, the women of this world bear their sorrows in beautiful ways. They busy themselves with all kinds of mundane pleasures and beautiful things while living lonely lives waiting for their beloveds to return from their "larger than life" pursuits. The story of *River of Fire* is in fact about the heartening struggle of this ideal world and these ideal men to continue being ideal regardless of the conflicting forces of history.

In this world, which in many ways resembles ours, a young man named Gautam Nilambar is caught between two opposing "images" on the same day. One is beautiful Princess Champak and the other is her fiancé who has renounced his throne in favor of the Truth. The Buddha has died more than a century ago but his Dharma and his way of life still complicate and deepen the mundane existence of Magadhian humans. During the night of that same day, Nilambar's mind struggles with these two images and latches onto the eternal problem of students, of seekers of truth. He spends his entire life, in a way, trying to answer this relatively simple question: whether to pursue a scholar's solitary life or a life of domestic bliss with the woman he loves? Before he can formulate an answer and obtain his beloved, the forces of history barge into his life, separating the lovers forever, even before they can express their inner thoughts to one another. The young couple becomes aware that history lurks perpetually in the background, watching for a moment to intrude in their lives. As in the case of this couple, history often seizes the very moment considered most precious to individual human beings. This narrative introduces the novel's central concern—the eternal and unavoidable tension, conflict and sometimes harmony between the personal and the historical.

At the beginning of the novel Hyder depicts the average person's desire to live free from the dominance and influence of the historical process. This historical process typically thwarts that desire. In the novel, for example, a group of artists is engaged in a debate about *rup* (form) and *arup* (non-form). Their lives are already immersed in art and philosophy. They desire an enlightened human existence. Then a war breaks out, i.e., history happens. Gautam Nilambar, a young artist and

scholar, says to his friends, "I am not interested in King Nanda, Vishnu Sharma and Chandragupta. *Why must they drag me into their conflict...*"² Gautam's question draws our attention to one of the key themes of the novel. Hyder may have had the very same question in her mind when she wrote. Moreover, Gautam's question is a signal that directs the reader along the path of the novel's central theme: the individual versus history. Hyder has carefully planted this sentence in her prose to be seen clearly by her readers. *River of Fire* has numerous episodes where "macro-political" events, such as invasions and changes of power, break into the "micro" lives of the members of the society. What I call "macro-political events" might be viewed as the forces of history or as history expressing itself. This novel, apparently a novel about Time, at its thematic level depicts and questions the function of history. Therefore, Gautam's individualistic and humanist question regarding what he has to do with the historical process, with this politics of the kings, becomes the central question of the novel. In fact, this is the central question of all ordinary, peace-loving individuals on the Indian subcontinent, people who have suffered endlessly under a process of history shaped by a brutal colonial era, which split both the outer landscape of the Subcontinent and the inner landscape of its inhabitants. For that very reason *River of Fire* must be read against the grain of teleological history.

The history in this novel and the historical nature of this novel are quite different from what we normally recognize as historical fiction.

²Qurratulain Hyder, *River of Fire (Aag ka Darya)* (New York: New Directions, 1998), p. 39. Emphasis added. Hereafter all references to the novel appear in the text.

³What I mean by teleological history has to be explained since I am to come back to it throughout this paper. In his book *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), Ronald Inden draws our attention to this issue:

The consequences for agency of this essentialism have been immense. [Vincent A.] Smith and his colleagues have assumed essences such as caste and rationality to be fixed premises for action and not the result of acts in changing circumstances. Placing them before history rather than at its shifting frontier, they have transformed those essences—"God", "reason", "liberty", "modernity", the 'free market', or, on the left, 'equality', 'democracy', the 'welfare state', or the 'revolution'—into agents. They have treated one or the other of them as the true subject of history, who used the people and institutions of some nation-state or the other as instruments. *So history has not been a tale of the contingent. It has been teleological...*" (p. 17, emphasis added)

River of Fire is an historical novel in the sense that its story runs parallel to Indian history. However, it is very different from the kind of epic novel which normally represents the historical novel.⁴ Hyder's novel is episodic. It depicts selected historical periods of Indian history, jumping over centuries-long "time-slots." For example, the first fifty pages of the novel take place in fourth century B.C.E. Then the narrative jumps (over the river Saryu) to the fifteenth century, just prior to the rise of Mughal India.

This episodic nature of *River of Fire* is important in terms of the novel's questioning of historiography, i.e., of history as a narrative of what has happened in the past. A history is often a large macro narrative. It tells the story of how things happened in a certain community or place. The historian constructing his "story" according to the laws of causality and of cause and effect rationality has been the guiding principle for writing history.⁵ As such, a history usually clarifies gloomy events that occurred in a community, and making sense out of seemingly unconnected events is one goal that a history seeks to achieve. In explaining the close affinity between fiction and history, Lionel Gossman makes a point worth quoting in full:

Those historians who have been most willing to recognize the role of imagination in the writing of history or the proximity of history and fiction have also, understandably, been most concerned to distinguish between the two, and to establish the specificity of history. Though there appears to be a certain longing to found the difference in the historical narrative's continued dependency on the real world, the specificity of history can probably be more easily defined in terms of its own rules, its own system, than in terms of a direct relation of dependency upon the real world. R. G. Collingwood, for instance, proposes three rules or conditions for history—that the historian, unlike the novelist, must localize his story in time and place; that all *history must be consistent with itself*, since there is only one historical world, whereas fictional universes, being autonomous, need not agree, and cannot clash; and that the *historical imagination is not*

⁴George Lukacs' classic work, *The Historical Novel*, gives the impression that the classical historical novel is an epic, a complete account of a given historic era. Hyder's novel, it could be argued, represents an entirely different genre of historical novel and it deserves much more serious study.

⁵E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 114-5.

*completely free but is bound to work from "evidence."*⁴

Here, Gossman explains the relative freedom of fiction compared to historiography. What is perhaps more important to us at this point is to see that the world of historiography is not "autonomous" and "bound to work from 'evidence.'" In other words, historical imagination cannot go beyond our mundane sense of verisimilitude and our everyday understanding of plausibility. Therefore, a history is coherent, consistent and complete. With its episodic nature, *River of Fire* intentionally ignores all these fundamental qualities of historiography while still using Indian history as one of the novel's loci of meanings or referents. While traditional historiography attempts to create unity and coherence in the story it narrates, Hyder's novel depicts disconnectedness, fragmentation and discontinuity.

The implied connection between the episodes in *River of Fire* is more mythical than historical. For example, the novel does not have a single story that unfolds, it has four similar stories that take place on the Subcontinent during different historical periods. In pre-Islamic India, it is the story of Gautam Nilambar's life with Hari Shankar, Champak, Nirmala, Sujata and others. During the Islamic era, Kamaluddin is the central character of the story, and Bano, a Muslim, and Champavati, a Hindu, are the women around him. During the colonial period, the story revolves around Cyril Ashley who is connected to Sujata Debi, Champa Jan and Maria Teresa. The late-colonial and postcolonial episode tells the story of Champa Ahmad, Gautam Nilambar, another Cyril Ashley, Kamaluddin, Nirmala and so on. These four stories are not linked together except for some marginal connections between the colonial and postcolonial episodes. The only apparent, and merely implied connection between them is the repetition of the names of characters. Names such as Gautam Nilambar, Champa, Sujata, and Hari Shankar recur throughout the two millennia time frame of the novel. One could argue that this repetition of names implies an almost mythical connection between the episodes, and mythical elements are not the "evidence" used for history writing.

⁴Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Pr., 1990), p. 248. Emphasis added.

⁵By "mythical" I mean the religious, karmic connotations, such as rebirth, that recurring names evoke in a South Asian mind. For example, at one level of connotation the name "Gautam" recurring throughout two millennia of time suggests the reincarnation or avatar of the same person.

These recurring names also suggest a circular sense of time and history.⁹ Epistemologically, this view of history is significant and important in producing a critique of what I would call "regular history." In the novel's four hundred twenty-eight pages Hyder creates a text that has a circular development. To be specific, the opening episode of the novel ends with Gautam Nilambar jumping into the river Saryu. This is fourth century B.C.E., one hundred fifty years after the Buddha's death. Then, in the closing episode, another Gautam Nilambar is watching the river Sarju flowing. This is twenty-five hundred years after the Buddha's birth.¹⁰ These two Nilambers are quite similar in terms of the suffering and the happiness they are experiencing in their lives, despite the fact that they are separated from one another by at least two millennia. It is obvious that the river Saryu and the river Sarju are the same.¹¹ Two thousand years of evolution in the language has slightly changed the name of the river, but not its function.

This circular sense of time is further established by the fact that the stories from the four periods are quite similar. In fact, this novel essentially has one story which happens four times with slight differences. It is a relatively simple story about the separation of lovers, loneliness, and relations between men and women.¹² Being similar, these stories suggest a

⁹The handling of the names of characters in *River of Fire* is similar to that found in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* where the names of the original members of the Jose Arcadio Buendia family are given to members of later generations of the same family. By doing this Marquez, among other things, gives a sense of circularity to the one hundred years of history in Macondo. It is interesting to note that Hyder uses this technique nearly ten years before Marquez. One might argue that Hyder's use of names, beginning with their use to hold two millennia of human history together, is much more complex and epistemologically crucial to her novel than Marquez's use of names in his novel.

¹⁰Hyder's choice of this time frame also has significance. It is said that Gautama Buddha's *Samsa* is to last five thousand years before the next Buddha appears. Hyder inserts her novel into this Buddhist conception of time which is itself circular. I think this also helps readers imagine an alternative Time that is different from the secular sense of time in historical discourse.

¹¹The river Saryu may recall Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Although this does not add much to the meaning of *River of Fire*, it does enhance the novel's timelessness which in turn deepens its mythical dimension.

¹²This story's being too simple could be cited as one flaw of the novel. Apparently, this novel rejects characterization and the telling of a story.

certain sense of the universality of human suffering and the circular nature of time. However, only the readers have an opportunity to see that similarity. Nilambar of the twentieth century is unaware that Nilambar of the fourth century B.C.E. has also experienced the same kind of human pain he is experiencing.

This fact implies another aspect of the nature of the historical process: history makes the individual life an insignificant dot of color in the fabric of history, which has multiple colors and layers of colors. In a sense, what a novel like *River of Fire* does is enlarge those small dots to reveal the inner landscape of the individual lives. *River of Fire* does this so wonderfully that it doesn't alienate those individual lives from the river of time and history, but rather depicts the dynamic and dialectical relationship between the individual and history. Here we see the river of history flowing through individual lives, but it is never allowed to flow over the individual and create a single, monolithic meaning for human life. The novel achieves this simply by being different from history—i.e., different from history as a narrative of what happened.

The novel's model reader and her specific relationship to the novel also suggest a remarkable non-linearity in the temporal dimension of *River of Fire*. I borrow the term "model reader" from Umberto Eco to mean the ideal reader the novel expects.¹² I have mentioned earlier that *River of Fire* has four stories whose similarity is only known to its readers, not to the characters in the novel. These stories have been arranged on a rotating stage as the scenes of a play. The model reader, who is like a spectator, is able to see each scene as the stage rotates. The reader is expected to recognize the similarities between the four stories and to see the thematic connections between them. Since there are no causal connections between these stories, the reader is forced to look at the mythical or irrational connections. This model reader is given a chance to experience a circular flow of time. Therefore, the reader has the richest and fullest experience of time, not the characters in the novel. The position of the model reader is made even stronger by the fact that the novel does not have a "hero" around whose life the story is centered. In the epic-like historicist novel, the hero is the master of time and he dominates the temporal dimension of the novel. With her unique way of orienting her reader

¹² *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). The model reader is "a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create" (p. 9).

towards the temporal dimension, Hyder creates a model reader who is hermeneutically more powerful than an average reader of history or the epic novel.

One can see a subtle irony built into this specific way of handling the temporal dimension. I have pointed out that the novel does not have a hero who dominates time. Even the government officer and Orientalist scholar Cyril Ashley is only a "petty hero" in the colonial segment of the story. Cyril Ashley, an agent of colonialism, is supposed to be an agent of history as well. Europeans came to India to rescue her from her own historical backwardness. Only Europeans could do that because they saw themselves as historically more advanced than India. In that sense, Cyril Ashley is an agent of history and time. But in the novel, Cyril Ashley is no more powerful than any of the other central characters. In fact, this colonial master of time meets with a sad lonely death. Against the stream of time, he is as insignificant as other human beings in spite of his colonial claims to be the master of history:

Death came to Cyril Ashley in a *lonely circuit house in a remote corner of Bihar*. He had returned on hoarseback after inspecting his indigo plantations. His orderly had taken off his riding boots, he had bathed and changed for dinner and was awaiting his usual sundowner in the drawing room when, all of a sudden, he felt he was going to die.

He stammered and *could not call out, Koi Hai*—he had had a massive stroke, and died *quietly in his armchair*.

Sir Cyril Ashley was buried in a *small European cemetery in the nearby district headquarters*. (p. 150, emphasis added)

Here Hyder depicts this agent of history dying as an insignificant, average man. His lonely death becomes even more ironic when it is compared with the attitudes and ideologies he had inherited when he first came to India. After completing his education at Cambridge, Cyril Ashley, an aspiring poet, is looking for a job:

Therefore, after going down from Cambridge, Cyril Ashley joined the Middle Temple in the City of London. Here, in neighbouring Fleet Street, journalists and wits assembled in coffee houses to discuss international affairs, foreign wars, the Turks, the Russians and India. The world was opening up. There was a lot [of] traffic—people were going to the New World and to the East. Both offered enormous opportunities to get rich quick—especially the East which was backward and politically in a shambles. (p. 105)

Cyril Ashley's friends persuade him to come to India where the situation "has become enormously beneficial" to them (p. 106). In other words, British colonialism is gaining strength in India and therefore Cyril and his fellow Englishmen are the agents of history. It is true that Cyril becomes extremely rich in India but, as Hyder depicts him, he is hardly the agent of a universal history which is committed to propelling India out of its backwardness. More importantly, Hyder seems to suggest that Cyril himself is a victim of the colonial ideology of history.

In order to show that Cyril is insignificant when seen against the entire history of the Indian subcontinent, Hyder stretches the temporal dimension of her novel out to two millennia, giving the impression that her story seeks to set Time against Eternity. In this way Cyril becomes master only of colonial Time, not of Eternity. In that sense, he is no different from Gautam Nilambar, Kamaluddin, and others who do not claim to be agents of history. Can there be any stronger way to critique the colonial ideology of history than to show that those who are supposed to be the agents of history are also its victims? If history is concerned with Time, this novel is concerned with Eternity. Hyder puts both Cyril and the history over which he claims mastery into her novel's eternity-like temporality.

III

A history about what happened in the past privileges the present over the past. Since it is written in the present, it is necessarily the present's view of the past. As Kaviraj says, "the past [is] an image created in the interest of the present."¹³ More often than not, historiography uses the past to justify the present. For Kaviraj, this putting the past at the service of the present in historiography has a lot to do with the narrative mode of historiography itself.¹⁴ To put Kaviraj's argument in simple terms: In 1889 a male child was born to Motilal Nehru. In 1947 this child became the prime minister of India. When nationalist histories were written after 1947, that child who was born in 1889 was not just Motilal Nehru's son, he was the father of the nation. In historical retrospect, his birth was the

¹³Kaviraj, *Unhappy*, p. 108.

¹⁴Sadlipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 7, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 19.

birth of the father of the nation. Hyder attempts to break free from such a linear, rational organization of events in her novel.

One can achieve several goals by representing history as non-linear. In part, Qurratulain Hyder wants to transcend the various nationalist claims to Indian history. These nationalist claims, regardless of which side they come from, often postulate homogeneous and monolithic histories. The author here seems to be working out a much "larger" concept of history where diverse ethnic groups all have equal space to watch history happening. The stream of human life in the novel is a wonderful mix of different cultures. Even in fourth century B.C.E., the crown prince Hari Shankar disguises himself as a Greek, and Champak talks "matters of intellect with visiting Chinese scholars" (p. 4). From that point on, India becomes increasingly multiethnic, multicultural and cosmopolitan. This depiction of India challenges both homogeneous nationalist histories and colonial histories of the "backwardness" of India.

By making room for what regular history usually ignores, Hyder transcends some of the crucial limits of history. Historical discourse does not have any space for irrationality. Broadly speaking, irrationality is everything that does not make rational or mundane sense. It could be poetry, myth, dream, ghost or God Himself. Historians generally leave out elements that don't fit into the cause-and-effect sensibility of historiography. Hyder, in contrast, brings many irrational or supernatural incidents into her narrative in such a way that, in some instances, she implies that that irrationality itself determines the course of history. She juxtaposes history, fiction and parable when fictionalizing the beginning of the European presence in India. She intermingles multiple narratives with multiple epistemologies:

Bengal has become one great bazaar of European traders. This Sultanate was annexed by Akbar and his Empire extended across the land-mass of Hindustan. When years later, the decline began, the Mughal subadars or viceroys of Bengal, called Nawab-Nazims, declared their autonomy. Prophet Sulaiman had been granted sway over land and sea by Allah. He was also the king of djinnas, paris and demons, and birds and animals. He could converse with them. He was also the richest man on earth. Once he said to God, "O Allah! I wish to invite all Thy creatures to dinner at my place." God said, "Go ahead!" So an enormous feast was prepared. One fish came out of the sea and finished off the banquet. God said, "O Sulaiman! Only I can feed all my creatures." Now, this parable does not imply that Siraj-ud-Daulah, Nawab-Nazim of Bengal, had ever claimed to

be like King Solomon. It transpired however, that the Law of Taxila's Chanakya began to operate once again. A whale called Admiral Watson came out of the sea. Siraj-ud-Daulah proved to be a small fish because Mir Jaffer, a crab, turned traitor. So Watson and Clive swallowed poor Siraj without even saying "Thank you." (p. 103)

This paragraph begins with historical facts: Europeans are present in India and King Akbar's Empire is expanding. Nawab-Nazims declare their independence—a decision that causes the Empire to collapse. With this factual history, the writer interweaves the mythical story—a parable. The parable is about a king who, carried away by his extreme prowess, transgresses the limits of mundane power. By doing so, the king unconsciously attempts to go beyond the power of God. Power too has its limits. One big fish completely finishes off the food that King Solomon has arranged for all the creatures. The King comes to the painful awareness that his power does not extend over all beings. An earthly king, regardless of his supremacy, is still a human and cannot take care of all beings. In a way the parable is about the limits of human power. Adjoining the parable, Hyder brings in history again: The Chanakya dynasty is rising—a threat to the Nawab-Nazims. Then European invaders come in. The historical moment becomes chaotic and complicated. Admiral Watson's intervention in Indian politics is told as a semi-mythical or semi-historical narrative. The whale named Admiral Watson is juxtaposed with the big fish in the parable. Watson does exactly what the big fish did at the banquet. In a separate paragraph, Hyder, who knows her craft well, writes: "Now the magnificent waterways of Bengal are crowded with Englishmen's trading vessels. They are the new overlords" (p. 103).

With just these two paragraphs, the author depicts the transition of power from the Mughals to the British. Real history definitely has more to say about this event. Nevertheless, Hyder's narrative is much richer in meaning for it allows the irrational in. Some sort of intervention by God is implied in the narrative. One other important thing that happens here is that the two epistemologically divergent narratives embrace each other. These two narratives are history and parable and they are epistemologically different because history is "factual truth" and parable is "fabulous truth." Also, when this parable is joined with history, it suggests the local people's "ahistorical" understanding of the political change which was to come about with the arrival of the white man in the Indian Ocean. Yet, in rational historiography, those fabulous truths and invisible ancestors have no place. Dipesh Chakrabarty is right in saying, "Gods, spirits, and

other 'supernatural' forces can claim no agency in our [historical] narratives."¹⁵ By bringing such elements into her narrative Hyder challenges regular history. But Hyder, who seems to be in favor of literary realism, does not use this kind of multi-layered narrative device as much as she could have. Partly this has to do with the fact that when she wrote her novel in the 1950s, the limits-of-realism debate in the literary world had yet to become a worldwide phenomenon.

At one point in human history, historical narrative had a place for supernatural powers. In fact, those supernatural powers had agency to decide and direct the process of history. In his *Nation and Its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee provides a good illustration of how, at one time, "myth, history and contemporary—all [became] part of the same chronological sequence. One [was] not distinguished from another."¹⁶ Chatterjee's claim is related to what he calls the "Putanic history" that came out of Fort William College in Calcutta. A Sanskrit teacher at that college, Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, wrote the first printed history book of India in the Bengali language (*Rajyatali*, 1808). When he wrote it, he didn't do any research to find factual evidence, rather he simply wrote down the "accounts" that were circulating among Bengali Brahmins.¹⁷ Understandably, this history of India is full of supernatural beings and events. The "account" of the fall of the king of Delhi, Prithviraj Chouhan, to the Muslim king, Shihabudin Muhammad Ghuri, ending the "Hindu dynasties," is worth discussing here as an example. Vidyalankar records that when the Muslim king was approaching Delhi, King Prithviraj summoned a number of Vedic scholars and asked them to arrange a sacrifice to send away the intruder. The scholars did so. But they were unable to lay the sacrificial block at the correct auspicious time. Isvara, the god, did not wish to have that sacrifice take place and therefore it wasn't successful, the Delhi throne went to the Muslim king.¹⁸ This narrative, in essence, is a mixture of myth and history. More importantly, since the god's wishes determine the political, material details regarding the fall of Prithviraj are of no concern to Vidyalankar in his history. Chatterjee states

¹⁵Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Pr., 2006), p. 73.

¹⁶Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Pr., 1993), p. 80.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 77–8.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 81.

that this was the form of historical memory prevalent among Bengali literati at the time."²⁷

With British rule and modernization, history entered in its modern form, and it was no longer a "play of divine will" but merely a "struggle for power."²⁸ Chatterjee argues that modern "scientific" history expelled supernatural power from historical narrative. With that, I think, historical narrative lost an important form of social memory. When Dipesh Chakrabarty laments the fact that supernatural forces have no agency in our history, he is alluding to the importance of this mythical social memory. Mythical stories, in spite of their irrationality, have to be taken into account when exploring the cultural episteme of a community. I would suggest that mythical story is a supplement to history and it gives history something that history itself cannot preserve. At least to a degree, *River of Fire* enriches itself with such nonrational elements.

IV

The portrayal of women in *River of Fire* is also connected to the novel's questioning of the received notion of history. Women in this novel, in addition to their committed support of the pursuits of their men and their endurance of pain, are significant in terms of the theme of the novel. We have seen here that creating a narrative space related to history but much more fluid is one central theme of this novel. Hyder brings her female characters into the foreground of her narrative in such a way that their very presence enhances the meanings of the novel in a remarkable way. As usual, men are the real agents and subjects of the history in the story. This history is made up of what I have called the macro-events of human life. Those events are things like war, bringing kings into power, creating kingdoms, discovering ultimate truths, and so on. These things are basically the affairs of men. When history invites men, they are bound to go. Women are usually the victims and observers of this male history. However, while depicting this reality, Hyder also underscores what women add to history—an addition which often goes unheard and unrecorded. She makes a conscious attempt to read the history of the Indian subcontinent through its women.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

First, she brings up memories and stories of heroic women who were players in the dominant, male landscape of history. For example, one important story that goes into Kamaluddin's travelogue tells about Razia, a female Muslim monarch who wanted to abolish the tax paid by Hindus in lieu of military service. She is eventually assassinated and people believe that it was politically motivated (pp. 61–2). Kamaluddin comments in his book:

I marvelled at this woman who knew how to rule over a vast empire and a people who belonged to a very different religion and were generally hostile to the Turks. She belonged to the Turko-Iranian tradition of able female monarchs, though the world knows little about them (pp. 61–2, emphasis added)

Kamaluddin's note suggests one of the goals Hyder wants to achieve by bringing women into the landscape of the novel: to tell stories of women about whom the world knows little. Razia's "enlightened policies" were not approved of by the ministers of her cabinet, the real agents of history. When she was murdered the official record said that robbers killed her. This story of Razia signifies a woman's place in the politics of men and her place in the history of men. In that context, one other important piece of information about her is that she referred to herself as Sultan, not Sultana. This also shows the fact that the real loci of history, such as politics, are such that a woman must present herself as "manly" in order to fit in. But, even in doing that, when a woman enters the political domain and acts as a man, a certain sense of humaneness appears in the political domain. That humaneness is the only crime Sultan Razia commits.

Kamaluddin records the story of another queen, Bibi Razi, who removes her beloved son from the throne because of his inhumane deeds and his despotism. She brings her younger son, a musician, to power in his place. When the first son begins to wage war against his younger brother, the Queen herself plays a role in the slaying of her violent son (pp. 64–5). Her womanly intervention in political affairs gives a more humane face to the often violent domain of statecraft. When women and music enter the domain of politics they can even soften the swords and men that often determine the course of history. And the women in *River of Fire* alter the nature of the realm where *real history* takes place.

Moreover, the women in *River of Fire*, even when they don't have any significant say in political matters, challenge male-centered history by standing for alternative views and sensibilities. Bano, a young woman and

a cousin of the musician-king, whom Kamaluddin comes to know, is unhappy that the king has to spend half his time waging war instead of composing music. She is just one of the women we find in this novel who prefer music, art and aesthetic pursuits to war, statecraft and the like. Things such as music have little or nothing to do with the real interests of history. History, the state being its playing field, considers politics to be its theme, subject and activity. Art and scholarly pursuits are the innocent neighbors of real history. Interestingly, more often than not women populate that adjacent realm, not only Bano, but also other women throughout the two millennia period of this novel. Champak, Nirmala, Champavati, Sujata, and many others represent this alternative domain. Of course, even in that domain women are more often victims than victors. Hyder illustrates, however, that women's ideas are otherworldly ideas about worldly matters.

The women in *River of Fire* also stand in the way of the dominant history in a different, and extremely important, sense as well. That is, when they challenge the Orientalist history of India and Indian women. Here history takes on the second meaning I have adopted in this discussion, history in the sense of historiography. In that sense, I think, Hyder's female characters produce a strong postcolonial critique of the condition of women in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial India. These three historic eras have their own ideologies and material conditions with regard to women. In the pre-colonial India of the novel, contrary to common Orientalist belief, the women enjoy a relatively prestigious status. Champak, Nirmala and their servant, the first women we encounter in the novel, are from the fourth century B.C.E. They appear to be very intelligent and to be knowledgeable about matters outside their homes. The subject of their first conversation is a final year student who happens to cross the river in which they are bathing. The women—of course they're princesses—freely enjoy their lives in the outside world. We hear them giggle. They talk among themselves sympathetically about the student. They are aware of the nature of scholarly and ascetic lives. The pressure of the scholarly pursuits of their men is directly on them. The crown prince of the provincial kingdom has left home to study at Taxila University. Champak, the crown prince's fiancée and "leader" of the giggling women, has been waiting for him for eight years. During those painful years she has also been "discuss[ing] matters of intellect with visiting Chinese scholars" (p. 4). Then the women develop a friendship with the poor, white-robed, poet-painter and student, Gautam Nilambar. This is a world where sixty-three systems of thought exist, Buddhism being the

latest addition just one hundred and fifty years ago (p. 8). In this world, women are also educated, not marginalized. It's true, their men have not included them in their own worldly pursuits, nevertheless the women of this world are neither illiterate nor ignorant.

Women of course do suffer as a result of the politics and worldly affairs of their men. However, women understand and, in some cases, respect what their men are doing. At one level, these women are aware of the fact that their men are engaged in matters which historical conditions, political developments, and fate itself have forced them to be involved in. That awareness signifies the fact that these women are not excluded from what is happening. Nothing happens behind their backs. Having a space of their own does not mean they are left out of what men are doing. The relationship between Champavati, the second Champa of the novel, and Kamaluddin, the Persian traveler, illustrates the relatively equal social and intellectual positions of women and men. In his travelogue, Kamaluddin describes Champavati as a highly intelligent and beautiful young woman. More importantly, as a fellow student of Kamaluddin she engages in erudite conversations with him and freely befriends other men (pp. 75-9). This is fifteenth-century India. One can see that the nature of men's relationships with women has not much changed from the first Champa of the novel, i.e., in the fourth century B.C.E. Of course, Kamaluddin also happens to leave Champavati behind, but with genuine hopes and promises to come back. Later in his life, he regrets this separation.

The nature of relationships between men and women undergoes a dramatic shift when the British colonialists arrive in India. It is Cyril Ashley, the colonial "hero" of the novel, who seduces a woman as soon as he steps into India and then leaves her behind. Cyril comes to India with a full set of ideological baggage about Indian women. Deceiving women with beautiful words happens in this novel only after the coming of European colonialism. It is Cyril Ashley who does this for the first time. Readers are provided with an opportunity to compare the lives of women in the pre-colonial and colonial eras. The carryover of the names of the main characters, among others things, invites such a comparison. "Champak" is the name of a princess of the pre-Islamic episode. Then, we meet Champavati in Islamic India, Champa Jan in colonial India and Champa in postcolonial India. In many ways, all of these Champas suffer in a male-dominated world over the course of two millennia. Women's suffering is universal. Within that universal reality of women, Hyder suggests that it is from the colonial time that men began to intentionally "play" with women's lives. Hindu-Buddhist Gautam Nilambar, or Mus-

lim Kamaluddin do not intentionally deceive their respective Champas, rather the historical conditions and political developments cruelly separate the lovers. During the pre-colonial period, both men and women are depicted as merely victims, observers, and participants in history. During the colonial time, in contrast, a person like Cyril Ashley, being a colonial officer, has some agency over history. He is a director of the colonial drama of history. Therefore, his deceiving the Indian girl Maria Teresa cannot be blamed on history. Hyder makes clear that the ideological apparatus is at work when the English gentleman deludes the girl by telling us that Cyril has been advised not to marry a "black girl." Cyril's approach to native people is already tainted with colonial and Orientalist concepts of Indians. Later, this same Cyril Ashley keeps Sujata Debi, the pretty, young daughter of a local scholar, as his mistress and he makes a separate zenana for her in his mansion. This Sujata Debi is the younger sister of a woman whom Cyril had rescued from being burned alive, i.e., from the rite of sati. Cyril has appointed her brother, Prafulla, a minor officer under himself. Therefore, Prafulla could not resist when Cyril suggested that he send his sister to Cyril's house to be the Englishman's mistress:

In accordance with the *social norms of the time* you could take a *native woman as a concubine or common law wife*. She was given the *respectable Indian title of bibi, lady*. Therefore, Cyril approached his young employee with, "I say, would your sister like to reside in my bungalow as my *bibi*?"

Prafulla Kumar was much too obliged to Cyril Sahib to decline the offer. (p. 124, *emphasis added*)

This quote illustrates that the colonial ideology has created "social norms" and those norms have been backed by the colonial administrative structure. In other words, both those norms and Cyril's social power are colonial constructions. His power to rescue one sister from sati and to make the other his mistress comes from the colonial ideology and power structure. By showing what happens to the second sister, Hyder reveals what was lying behind Cyril's liberal humanist mask when he rescued the first sister: dominance over natives and their women.

Thus, the relationship between men and women has taken on a new shape. This "new shape" continues to exist in postcolonial times and even Indian men utilize the "Cyril Ashleyan approach" with women. Here, Hyder juxtaposes the colonial attitude toward India itself and Cyril Ashley's attitude toward Indian women. Cyril Ashley does, of course, rescue

one young woman who was going to be killed according to the traditional custom of sati (p. 114-7), yet the ideological apparatus that he and colonialism bring lead, in the end, to the marginalization of Indian women. Hyder's depiction of the limits of European liberal humanism, and the irony that that depiction produces, dismantles the colonial universal history into which the colonialists had tried to put India and its women. The Champa of the postcolonial segment, to return to the novel, is a victim of Cyril Ashleyan ideas of sexuality. In many ways, pre-colonial women enjoyed a much higher position in their relationships with men than colonial and postcolonial women do. This again defies the well-known colonial historicist claims that it was European colonialism that saved Indian women from Indian savagery. *River of Fire* provides a nuanced depiction of pre-colonial Indian women and juxtaposes it with an equally nuanced portrayal of colonial Indian women such that the novel becomes a powerful text resisting colonial history and its ideology.

V

Not only women but also other characters that Hyder brings in are from the margins of society. They are on the margins both politically and intellectually. In the official history, the heroes are the kings and queens and other similar individuals, because history is written around them. In *River of Fire*, the lives of ordinary people, their worldviews and their priorities in life are given a voice by Hyder. In many cases, her heroes are wandering scholars, poets, painters and life-long students. They live on the margins of the society. Even in the cases where poet-kings have political authority, the voice of the poet in them often goes unheard. Political thinking is the core of history and history is written around the state. Poetic thinking is among the first things that historical reasoning seeks to get away from when it constructs the narrative of history. Hyder is acutely aware of this fact and therefore her history-like fiction is a narrative of those unheard voices. She looks into the lives on the periphery of the social fabric, where only poets and women struggle to remain truthful and humane.

This novel is indeed about Time.²¹ But it's not about abstract Time, it's about historicized time. It is mediated time, discursively organized time. *River of Fire* shows that human beings on the Indian subcontinent increasingly historicize Time in both meanings of "history." For example, early in the novel, cultural or religious differences and macro politics are clearly separated from people's everyday lives. Those differences don't penetrate into micro life, into the emotional relationships between members of society. But by the twentieth century, nationalism and communalism (in other words, historical events) make these differences a part of people's personal lives. Early in the novel, i.e., early in time, religious and ethnic differences don't affect personal relationships as they do later in the novel during the postcolonial era. For example, in the second segment of the novel, Kamaluddin asks his Hindu "lover" Champavati to marry him. She says, "If I was married to you in my previous janams, I'll marry you now, too." She also says, "If my karma and sankaras are such, I'll become a Muslim and be your spouse" (p. 78). Champavati's thoughts regarding marrying a Muslim are determined by mundane historicism. Her thinking shows no particular concern for religion or ethnicity per se. It derives from a worldview that is larger than history, for karma or *sankaras* have nothing to do with mundane events. History is there, but people's thinking has not been shaped by it. However, when it comes to the colonial and postcolonial segments of the novel, Champavati's transcendental framework of thinking has disappeared and all thinking emerges from mundane history. Hyder, in a way, implies this crucial change, when she says, "For [Cyril Ashley] the bank of England had long been more important than the Church of England" (p. 147). She seems to suggest here that he does not have a framework for thought that goes beyond the historicist colonial ideology which justifies his seducing Indian women and keeping them around to fulfill his sexual desires. This increasing historicization of Indian life is expressed through new ethnic relations. In the colonial segment Professor Bannerjee says that "Hindu-Muslim riots were unknown before the arrival of the English" (p. 253). This is still colonial India and one can easily see Indian life being historicized. The political culmination of this historicizing is, of course, the partition of India. Yet, its most tragic effects are seen elsewhere. For example, Champa Ahmad loses her lover Amir, even though he is of the

²¹Thomas Palskeel, "Experimental Novel and the Problems of Imagined History," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 14 (1999), p. 300.

same religion, because history has given him new interests in life: "a brand new country, promotions, greater opportunities and challenges" (p. 266). This couple does not have a framework for thinking, which is "outside of history"—as Champavati had had about five centuries earlier. This twentieth-century Champa is entrapped by history, and a historicist approach is the only way for her to live. The young idealistic group of friends is "partitioned" by the Partition. The Kamal of the twentieth century ridicules Champa Ahmad by saying, "Champa Baji, congratulations! Your Pakistan has come into being, after all." The narrator explains the intensity of his words: "Intense bitterness, irony and heartbreak lent an edge to his voice" (p. 264). Here the reader is invited to compare this Kamal with the Kamal of the fifteenth century. Figuratively, Kamal has, over the course of time, positioned himself completely within the discourse of history. In the end Champa Ahmad lives alone in India. This novel is about Time and the historicizing of Time in the sense that it shows history's gradual invasion of the mind and that partitioning within the mind is only a matter of Time.

River of Fire illustrates how history, both as a process of events happening and as a narrative of what has happened, gradually draws Indian life into a larger narrative and thus produces a strong critique of that process. It does so by standing for the antithesis of history at one level and by being a supplement to history at another. History-like-fiction invites fiction-like reading. Any work of fiction, unlike a work of history, can be read in multiple ways. This is one of the great qualities of literature. Yet, a work like *River of Fire* should be read in the way the work itself invites us to read it. The last thing Hyder would want her readers to do is approach this novel as if they were reading history. This is fictional history. She has consciously and meticulously created it as such. Fictional history is epistemologically different from what we generally call "history." Real history is monologic, teleological and often ideologically constructed. Fictional history, on the other hand, is dialogic, less teleological, and challenges the ideologies that it is based on, if not actually presenting an entirely different worldview. In history, one meaning or interpretation comes from the author and travels in a unidirectional trajectory. In fictional history, multiple meanings arise from different zones of the text and travel everywhere along multiple trajectories. However, the implication is that we readers should be careful not to draw fictional history back into "real" history and make it rigid in the way that history is. Fictional history is fluid and we must read it fluidly. *River of Fire* yields eminently to such a fluid reading.

The West in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination: Some Reflections on the Transition from a Persianate Knowledge System To the Template of Urdu and English

The aim of the [Muhammadian Anglo-Oriental] college was "to form a class of persons, Muhammadan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect.

—Sir Syed Ahmad Khan¹

This colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. ... Particularly, once the British rulers and the exposed sections of Indians internalized the colonial role definitions ... the battle for the minds of men was to a great extent won by the Raj.

—Ashis Nandy²

The ideas that invaded Urdu literature from the West were not only modern and novel, they were culturally alien. And they introduced disruptive elements into our literary thought. For all their philosophical soundness, these ideas inaugurated a long period of disequilibrium. There are no signs even today

¹As quoted in David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 207. The statement is a rephrasing of the famous statement contained in Macaulay's Minute on Education, 1835.

²*The Intimate Enemy* (1983; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. xi, 6–7.

that the old equilibrium will soon be restored, or that a new equilibrium is about to be achieved.

—Shamshad Rahman Faruqi¹

I

THIS PAPER PROPOSES TO deal with the impact of the West on the Persianate² knowledge system as it obtained in India, and some of the underlying assumptions regarding the creation of literature and its functions. Persian enjoyed the pride of place in India for several centuries preceding British rule, not only as the language of administration but also as the language of knowledge and cultural exchange. It was cultivated and spoken in India from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries,³ acquired a distinctly Indian flavor and came to be known as *sabab-e hindī*. It was also the mediating language through which many Indian classical texts were translated.⁴ Many Mughal emperors, princes and princesses wrote belles

¹"Modern Urdu Literature," in *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology*, Vol. I, ed. K.M. George (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992), p. 422.

²For a concise view of the Persianate knowledge system as it obtained in India during the Mughal period and how it later facilitated the growth of an Oriental discourse, see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and The Middle East*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1996).

³G.N. Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1995), p. 6. Devy, as indeed other literary historians in India such as Sisir Kumar Das, credits Persian and other Islamic languages with facilitating the rise of indigenous languages. He says, "The emergence of *bhasha* literatures coincided with, even if it was not entirely caused by, a succession of Islamic rules in India. The Islamic rulers—Arab, Turks, Mughals—brought with them new cultural concerns to India, and provided these currents legitimacy through liberal political patronage. The languages—Arabic and Persian, mainly, and Urdu which developed indigenously under their influence—brought new modes of writing poetry and music. This intimate contact with Islamic cultures created for the *bhasha* literatures new possibilities of continuous development" (p. 3).

⁴To promote harmony among different religions and communities, Emperor Akbar (r.1556–1605) sponsored debates among religious scholars of different persuasions. He also facilitated the translation of Sanskrit and Arabic texts into Persian. Persian translations from Sanskrit included *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *Bhagavat Purana*, *Atharva Veda* and *Yug Bhashit*. Dara Shikoh's

lettres and discursive compositions in Persian. The Hindu Kayasth community collectively cultivated Persian to consolidate their position in the Mughal administration.⁷ The language continued to hold its prominent position even when the Mughal powers declined. The British administrators had to learn it to communicate with the Mughal court and for other purposes. Men of letters, knowledge and sophistication, cutting across religion and locales, considered knowledge of Persian important for gaining insight into the great Indo-Muslim civilizational encounter. We know that Ghālib prided himself on his Persian compositions in preference to his Urdu verses. Some of the nineteenth-century Renaissance Indians, Raja Ram Mohan Roy being one of them, were great men of learning in Persian and Arabic. Swami Vivekananda had a good knowledge of Persian. Many of the famed Indologists like William Jones,⁸ John

(1615–59) interest in comparative religion led to the Persian translation of the *Upanishads*. He not only wrote *Majma'u'l-Bahrain* (Mingling of Oceans) to highlight the commonality between Sufi and Hindu thoughts, but caused many other Sanskrit works to be translated into Persian.

"A politically influential and intellectual community in pre-colonial India, with a tradition of occupying administrative posts under both Hindu and Muslim rulers, they were fluent in Persian, Urdu, their mother tongues and frequently in Sanskrit as well. This command over more than one language, and especially over more than one script, including a rumored secret script, was a major source of their power and prosperity. It enabled Kayastha men to dominate bureaucracies in pre-colonial India, from the highest to the lowest levels, to shape policy and law, and also to acquire land." Ruth Vanita, "Gandhi's Tiger: Multilingual Elites, the Battle for Minds, and English Romantic Literature in Colonial India," in *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2002), p. 99.

⁷Jones is famed to have learned twelve languages. His knowledge of Persian language and literature was extensive. He not only wrote *A Grammar of Persian Language* (1771) but also studied and commented on almost all notable poets of post-Islamic Persia with a degree of catholicity and openness that was rare among Orientalists. The eclecticism of his taste is evident from the fact that he was almost equally enthusiastic about Sa'di (d.1290), Hāfiẓ (d.1392) and Nizāmī (1141–1211). His connection to Persianate scholars predated his arrival in India in 1783. For a precise account of his translation and appreciation of Persian poetry, see the chapter "Jones and Persian Poetry," in R.K. Kaul, *Studies in William Jones: An Interpreter of Oriental Literature* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993).

Gilchrist⁵ and others considered Persian essential for understanding Indian culture and literature, and acquired it to an appreciable degree. However, all this began to change imperceptibly by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶ There were compelling reasons for this change.

II

The cataclysmic events of 1857 marked the end of the court and signaled, as Percival Spear put it, a profound "break with the cultural as well as political tradition."⁷ They were inevitably followed by shock, reflections and the realignment of forces within Indian society, particularly in northern India. One thing was certain—the status of Persian as the privileged language of administration, thoughts, and ideas was irrevocably lost. What we would see in the next couple of decades was the gradual flowering of vernaculars and English. I intend to investigate some aspects of this transformation which, in some cases, resulted in what Chris A. Bayly calls "epistemological balkanization" in his book *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870*.⁸

"The shift from embodied to institutional knowledge," says Bayly "was very clear in the domain of political intelligence where, by the 1830s, office memory had largely displaced the virtuosity of the munshi and the *wakil*."⁹ Language had always remained a crippling problem with East India Company officials since they had to translate English documents into Persian and vice versa, which they could hardly do without the

⁵For Gilchrist's pioneering work in Persian and Hindustani, see 'Asiq Siddiqi, *Gilchrist aur Us ka 'Abd* (Gilchrist and His Age) (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu Hind, 1960).

⁶"It must be pointed out, however, that despite the withdrawal of official patronage, Persian showed its considerable resilience for the following century. "It was common until the nineteen twenties, if not even later, for Persian poetry to be recited at Urdu mushairahs without the audience and the poet feeling any incongruity. Until the nineteen fifties, individual Urdu poets' collections often contained a bit of Persian poetry too." Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 190.

⁷Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals* (1951; Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 83.

⁸Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 144.

mediation of Indians. It was not a happy situation from the point of view of the British rulers. William Jones voiced the frustration of the British administrators who did not know sufficient Persian to read letters and documents that often contained metaphors and poetic verses. It was highly dangerous, said Jones, "to employ the natives as interpreters upon whose fidelity they could not depend."¹⁴ Further, beyond the question of fidelity and betrayal, translation from Persian into English often presented problems of a complex nature. As Neil Edmonstone, an influential figure in the formation of the Foreign and Political Department of India, pointed out, the rhetorical forms of Persian could not accommodate the "refined terms" and accuracy of English expression.¹⁵ Impatience with Persian as the mediating language had been growing in the administration in the early decades of the nineteenth century and, in 1837, the Company decided to expand the use of English and Hindustani in official business.

III

The process had been set in motion with the resolution of 7 March 1835 which stipulated that funds provided should "be henceforth employed in imparting to the Native population knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language."¹⁶ Persian lost its patronage at a single stroke. Many memorialists have recorded how madrasas that taught Persian were reduced to ordinary *maktabs* or grammar schools, and attendance in them dwindled after the proclamation as there would be no new positions requiring Persian-knowing professionals like *qāṣṣ*, *munshis*, and so on. It also resulted in the gradual loss in the status of the *munshi*, that hallowed and mediating figure of colonial knowledge. Though Persian would still continue to be learned and cherished by the elite for several decades, it was certainly on its way out. Sisir Kumar Das puts the entire situation in perspective when he observes:

Twentieth century saw the final withering away of Persian after its glorious existence in Indian society for nearly six centuries. Iqbal was the last

¹⁴William Jones, Preface to *A Grammar of the Persian Language*, 8th ed. (London: W. Nicol, 1813), p. 7.

¹⁵Edmonstone to his father, 18 April 1798, quoted in Bayly, p. 95.

¹⁶As quoted in Tejarwini Nizanjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995), p. 29.

Indian poet to use it with mastery. Persian, however, remained a popular language among scholars, was studied in schools and colleges but no longer was it a language of literary expression in India. Being the vehicle of a great literature it continued to have an aura of respectability and remained a source of myths and legends and metaphors and imagery....¹⁷

Though the erosion of status enjoyed by Persian had started earlier, the upheaval of 1857 precipitated it with serious implications, particularly to the Persian-knowing and Urdu speaking Muslim elite. Members of this elite were now clearly divided into two distinct groups. One group, designated as the "traditionalists" remained obdurately hostile to the British. They realized that British power was here to stay and was not to be challenged for many years to come. Their strategy was one of withdrawing from the political contest and cultivating the traditional knowledge system that largely, though not exclusively, concentrated on religion. One great center of Muslims of this group was the theological seminary at Deoband, U.P., established in 1869. The other well-known centers were the Nadwatul 'Uloom of Lucknow, established in 1894, and Firangi Mahal, also in Lucknow. It seems somewhat paradoxical that it was this orthodox group that participated actively in the movement for independence, rather than the modernists, many of whom were ambivalent in their attitude towards the British. The modernists, too, believed that the old Mughal order was gone forever, but they argued that they must make their peace with the new order or perish. They embraced the impact of the West in a substantial way and set the tone for changes that were to come in the following century. I would like to examine these changes with reference to three great personalities of the time who, to my mind, best exemplify the kind of churning that was symptomatic of the literary-cultural life of the Muslims in northern India in the second half of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century. These three are—Syed Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Husain Azad and Altaf Husain Halli. Broadly speaking, they shared sympathies and anxieties that were common. While Syed Ahmad Khan operated mainly in the sphere of educa-

¹⁷Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911–1956* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995), p. 34. For an insightful study of the impact of Persian on Bengali literature and culture, see his article in Bengali, "Iran Tomar Joto Bulbul," *Desh*, Vol. LXL, No. 9 (26 Feb. 1994), pp. 27–39.

tion, manners and morals, the other two were writers of considerable merit who played a significant role in canon formation in Urdu literature.

The "modernists" have come to be known as champions of the "new light." This phrase which roughly translates as "enlightenment" is significant. In their minds, scientific progress and moral superiority were interconnected. The British were not only the greater political power, they deserved intellectual emulation as well. They were convinced that it was the mastery of modern science and the adoption of modern ways of life that had been the basis of British preeminence. They were greatly impressed by nineteenth century European rationalism, empiricism and dynamism. Syed Ahmad Khan conceived the idea of a special journal *Tekmilah T-Akhlāq* to disseminate these ideals. As he knew he was addressing an audience largely orthodox in their religious outlook, he broadened his approach by setting down as a basic principle of Quranic exegesis that if a passage could be given a naturalistic explanation, that explanation must be accepted. Even paradise and hell could be interpreted as allegories and metaphors. *The Aligarh Institute Gazette* exhorted Muslims to "distinguish laws and social customs and institutions from religion in its strict sense."¹¹ It was pragmatism triumphing over obscurantism. *Tekmilah T-Akhlāq* also rigorously engaged with questions of morals and manners. A major intellectual inspiration was Joseph Addison, the eighteenth-century essayist who advocated "Rational Piety." He was, until recently, a regular part of the curriculum in colleges and universities. The journal exhorting Muslims to reform their worldview had a catalytic effect on society. A small but vocal group of Muslims rose against religious orthodoxy and obscurantist conventions. Threatened by Syed Ahmad Khan's efforts to modernize society, his adversaries in the community aired their indignation by writing extensively in newspapers and periodicals, colonial modernity's most attractive weapon for instantaneous dissemination and publicity. All this facilitated the spread of the vernacular. It has to be admitted, however, that Syed Ahmad Khan often carried his enthusiasm for Western manners and morals to a fine excess for which he was severely criticized. Periodicals like *Awadh Par* (founded by Munshi Sajjad Husain, 1877) thrived by bashing the Aligarh school, and poets like Akbar Allahabadi (1846–1920) provided a counterpoint to Syed Ahmad Khan's rather uncritical Anglophilia by making him a target of their barbed satire

¹¹Aysha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 76.

and cutting wit. However, what is of interest to us here is Syed Ahmad Khan's views on language and on how knowledge could be widely disseminated.

IV

The champions of the "new light" also shared what may be called a translated sensibility. Their minds were shaped to a considerable extent by their readings of Western texts in translation and their active participation in the process of translating and editing those texts. Translation into easier and simple Hindustani was started by John Gilchrist with the establishment of Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800. Later, the Delhi College performed a seminal role in making Western knowledge available in simple Hindustani. The onslaught that the Persianate knowledge system faced with the advent of Western ideas and thoughts was stupendous. C. M. Naim puts the issue in perspective when he says,

The decline of "Oriental" learning, the increasing awareness on the part of literate people of the range of scientific knowledge available in English, and the need to provide school texts in regional vernaculars, led a number of individuals and associations to produce translations as well as original works in Urdu in the realm of what was seen as *ilm* (knowledge; science), as opposed to *shir* and *daṭṭan* (poetry and tales). It is interesting to note that just when the teachers and students at the famous Delhi College (for the instruction of the natives) were engaged in translating into Urdu books on analytical geometry, optics, and galvanism, Goldsmith's *History of England*, selections from Plutarch's *Lives*, and Abercrombie's *Mental Philosophy*, the traditional *munshis* at the equally famous College of Fort William (for the instruction of British officers) were busy putting into simple Urdu the *Gulistan* of Sa'di, the *Tale of the Four Dervishes*, the *Tale of Amir Hamza*, *Sughdian Baitun*, the *Shakuntala* of Kalidasa, and a selection of stories from the *Arabian Nights*. . .¹⁵

¹⁵C. M. Naim, "Prize-Winning *Adab*: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Metcalfe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 291.

Slowly, Urdu acquired the status of a mediating language between Persian and regional Indian languages, and the imperial court began to use it for conducting its affairs with the regional powers.

Central to Syed Ahmad Khan's agenda of social reform was the establishment of the Scientific Society²⁰ at Ghazipur, later shifted to Aligarh. As the name suggests, the society was established to foster a scientific attitude. A key activity of this society was translation of English texts from literature, science, social science, agriculture, philosophy, and so on. To be sure, translation was at the center of the intellectual climate of the time. The colonial administration gave utmost encouragement to the translation of Western texts that would facilitate the process of acculturation. Āzād was actively engaged in Anjuman-e Panjab's key activities, one of which was translation of English texts into Urdu. And Hālī's job in the Punjab Government Book Depot consisted of editing and supervising the publication of books translated from English to Urdu. It would be unfair to expect that the translators in that period were sensitive to the various aspects of complex cultural negotiations, and to such concepts as the fact that "translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism."²¹ In fact, if one takes a close look at the translated literary texts of that period it will be found that translators were not unduly concerned about loyalty to the original text nor did they agonize much over producing a definitive version or edition of a text. Translations—more specifically, literary translations—were carried out more or less in the "fluent tradition," as Lawrence Venuti defines it in the context of English translation of Latin American texts in North America, where translations often masqueraded as the original.²² Translators and commentators often freely adapted ideas and texts at second, third or fourth hand.²³ However, this does not

²⁰For a detailed study of the objectives and achievements of the society, see Irfan Habib, "Syed Ahmad Khan and Modernization: The Role of Aligarh Scientific Society in the Mid-Nineteenth Century India," in *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Asloob Ahmad Ansari (Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2000), pp. 204–31.

²¹Niranjana, p. 2.

²²*The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²³For instance, Aḡāḥ Husain Hālī in his *Muqaddama* gives quite a bit of space to discuss Milton's concept of poetry as "simple, passionate and sensuous." But the tenor of his discussion leaves one in doubt as to whether he picked up the

detract from the fact that increased translation activity along with the spread of print media were crucial factors in the growth and spread of indigenous languages and the gradual disappearance of Persian.

V

Among the modernists, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98) was the towering figure who fiercely advocated reform in Muslim society. He was steeped in history as demonstrated by a whole range of writings, from editing Abu 'l-Fazl's *Ā'in-e Akbari* to writing *Ā'imra' ʿi-Sanadid* (1847), his famed tome on the historical monuments of Delhi. It was only natural that he should engage himself with the historical destiny of the Indian Muslims.²⁴ He expounded his ideas in a ceaseless stream of books, pamphlets and essays. For our present purpose we will confine ourselves mainly to his views on education and to his advocacy of the Urdu vernacular or English in place of Persian. During his sojourn in England in 1869 he brought out a pamphlet entitled, *Strictures on the Present State of English Education in India*. The argument he made in the book was that the government system of schools had failed to achieve either popular mass education or the stimulation of intellectual creativity. Before the coming of British rule, India had been notable for men of genuine learning and original thought. The sum total of all that had been effected by the English college has been to qualify an insignificant number of people as letter writers, copyists, signal men and railway ticket collectors. He believed that Indians of his, i.e., the older, generation had been better educated, educated to occupy positions of power. Now the equivalent education was confined to Englishmen in England. He suggested a three-tiered education system—and said that such a system could succeed in bringing about genuine cultural change if it was conducted in the vernacular even at the highest level. His advocacy of the vernacular was prompted by his eagerness to reach out to a wider

terms from Milton's "Tractate of Education," where they originally occurred in the context of children's education, or from Macaulay's essay on Milton, or Coleridge's discussion of them in *Biographia Literaria*, or from some other source. This is an interesting area in Translation Studies waiting to be explored, and likely to reveal interesting, curious, and even comical results.

²⁴For a synoptic view of Syed Ahmad Khan's works related to history and archaeology, see the essays by Iqidar Husan Siddiqui, Nazir Ahmad and Z.U. Malik in Ansari.

public so that knowledge was not confined to men of leisure only. It is worth recalling that in mid-nineteenth-century England, literature had gained a significance which went far beyond any view of it as polite pastime alone. English literature had come to be viewed as embodying the cultural history of the nation, or as Charles Kingsley put it in his inaugural lecture at the Queen's College in London in 1848, literature was nothing less than "the autobiography of the nation." Syed Ahmad Khan thought that if Indians were now to write the autobiography of their nation they had to write it in their own language and not in Persian.

When he established the Aligarh Mohammedan College in 1875, the desirable goal was to be able to conduct higher education in Urdu. And when the Oriental department was opened there in 1876 he made suggestions about Urdu textbooks in sciences and mathematics as well. But in practice, the course followed the lines of the Calcutta University except that Arabic and Persian remained the language of literature, logic and philosophy, and Urdu of history, geography, science and mathematics. English was taught as a second language. But as the courses got going Syed Ahmad Khan saw the effort towards vernacular education in action reaching one stumbling block after another and he was greatly disillusioned. Insistence on teaching through vernacular textbooks inevitably meant a lowering of standards. He was saddened by this painful realization. His earlier assumption that the mother tongue is the best medium for instruction received a severe jolt. He gave voice to this new realization in his testimony before W. W. Hunter's Education Commission in 1882.

Syed Ahmad Khan began his testimony by saying that although he was the original architect of the idea that students should be taught in the "vernacular," his view had undergone a change in light of the actual practice in the university. He now believed that the language of the ruling power must become the language of scholarship. He further pointed out that some of the exact sciences might require only very rudimentary English, since they consisted largely of universal symbols and technical terms. What really concerned him more now were what he called the "uncertain sciences," such as history, logic, philosophy, political economy, and jurisprudence. Here, however, the difficulties that he envisaged were not over technical vocabulary, or keeping up with the literature. The major obstacle was the style of expression communicated in ordinary Urdu. And, here he made a value-loaded statement that would infuriate Edward Said and a lot of others. In Urdu, according to Syed Ahmad Khan, it was virtually impossible to write without exaggeration, to separate metaphor from concrete reality. The remedy for this lay in English education. "As long as

our community does not, by means of English education, become familiar with the exactness of thought and unlearn the looseness of expression, our language cannot be the means of high mental and moral training."²¹ Language, according to his way of thinking, was not a passive tool to express one's ideas and experiences but an active agent molding the thought processes of its speakers and practitioners.

In this way, through the quirk of a set of circumstances, quite an easy transition took place from Urdu to English. One major goal of education, then, was gaining a high level of competence in English. Concepts in the arts and in social science subjects, as well as those of the natural sciences were to be taught in English. In other words, whatever was being taught, the primacy of English was firmly established, "not only its vocabulary and grammar, but genres and styles of exposition and expression as they had developed in the historical tradition of English literature. English was no neutral tool; it was to be an intentional instrument of acculturation to Victorian values, and ideas."²² It was almost like Macaulay's dream come true.

VI

Syed Ahmad Khan's support for the British in political matters and his educational and reformist programs influenced both Āzād and Ḥālī. Ḥālī was, of course, a close follower who totally identified with the Aligarh Movement. Āzād was less enthusiastic though he seemed to be in sympathy with some core issues espoused by Syed Ahmad Khan. The three of them were in touch with one another, drawing strength from each other's intellectual resources for their own pursuits. Syed Ahmad Khan never failed to appreciate the literary achievements of Āzād and Ḥālī. His high praise for Ḥālī's *Musaddat* is part of Urdu's literary history. Similarly, he praised Āzād for his advocacy of new poetic values and what he interpreted as Āzād's advocacy of "natural poetry." In a letter to Āzād written on 29 October 1882, he says:

I had wanted for a long time to see our poets turn their attention to nature. I received your *mumana*, *Khubab Aman*, and was happy to note the

²¹Syed Ahmad Khan's testimony to the Education Commission, in *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, Supplement, 5 August 1882, as quoted in Lelyveld, pp. 206–7.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 207.

realistic poetry and the forceful expression in it. There are still many fanciful things there. Bring your poetry closer to nature. The closer it is to nature, the more interesting it will be. Don't heed to people's taunts. It is necessary to borrow ideas from English poets and express them in Urdu....²⁷

If Syed Ahmad Khan advocated educational reforms, Muhammad Husain Āzād and Altaf Hussain Hāli raised serious questions about Urdu literature, mainly Urdu poetry. In their efforts to establish new canons of literature, they held up to scrutiny some of the long-standing assumptions about Persian and Urdu poetry and questioned their relevance in the new age.²⁸

Muhammad Husain Āzād (1830–1910) who “set the new tradition of literary prose for generations to come”²⁹ still remains the unrivaled master of Urdu prose. His life is an eventful one, and his literary career, according to the prominent Urdu critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “can be described as a triumph of British techniques of management and control in India.”³⁰ His father, the fiery editor of the periodical *Delhi Urdu*

²⁷Quoted in Shamim Hanfi, “Bāzād: Masallāh Muhammad Husain Āzād ke Lekhkar ‘Nazm-e-Urdū aur Kalām-e-Mausūf ke Bāh Mēh Khayālāt’ par,” in *Urdu Adab* (New Delhi) July–Sept. 2001, p. 47 [my translation].

²⁸Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, while recognizing the seminal contribution of Āzād and Hāli, points to some deleterious effects of their response to the Western thought: “We must therefore remember that before the advent of western ideas, Urdu literature was ... a true child of the Indo-Muslim ethos, unaffected (I would almost say ‘untainted’) by the feeling of embarrassment and guilt about poetry that had run like an undercurrent in the literary theories of the western world for two thousand years. Never had Urdu literature been called upon to declare whether it was on the side of truth and reality, or of fiction and imagination. Never had it been required to defend itself against charges of social uselessness and harmfulness.... It had always believed that what was important was what Nayaka had long ago called *ryāpara*, that is, the poet’s mode of doing things with words and themes. Now Urdu literature was suddenly in the dock, fighting for its life, charged with the crime of degeneracy and moral bankruptcy.” In his “Modern Urdu Literature,” p. 424.

²⁹Ali Jawad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993), p. 238.

³⁰Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “Constructing a Literary History, a Canon and a Theory of Poetry,” in *Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry: Muhammad Husain Āzād’s Ab-e-Hayāt* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 19. For Āzād’s biography and a critical perspective on his achievements, see Aslam Farukh.

Akhbar, was fiercely anti-British and supported the 1857 uprisings. He was hanged by the British in the most gruesome manner. Āzād had to flee for his life. After several years of wandering he reached Lahore in 1864 and found employment in a minor clerical job in the Department of Public Instruction. He supplemented his income by providing tuitions to Englishmen in Urdu. In 1864–65 he tutored Dr. G. W. Leitner, Principal of Government College in Lahore, who worked all his life for the promotion of the development of Western learning in Indian languages. In 1865 Āzād established Anjuman-e Punjab whose objectives were "revival of ancient learning, the advancement of popular knowledge through vernaculars, [and] the discussion of social, literary, scientific and political questions...."¹¹ The Anjuman was considered a great success and it is reported that because of this initiative, many cities began to manifest, "a growing interest in vernacular literature impregnated with the spirit of the west."¹² Āzād participated actively in the Anjuman's work and soon became a venerable figure of wide erudition, even though he seemed to have accepted the concept of British superiority and paternalism uncritically.

Āzād's ideas about Urdu poetry and poetics, and his sense of urgency to reform them, were first given public expression in his famous lecture on 9 May 1874, which he delivered under the aegis of the Anjuman-e Punjab. Many of his later ideas are prefigured in this extremely polemical lecture which caused a stir in literary circles. Besides a cross section of Indian scholars, several Englishmen of high official rank attended it. Āzād called for a new poetics, and a new kind of poetry based largely on English models. Taking recourse in a telling anthropomorphic metaphor, he pointed out that Urdu poetry had become old and decrepit because of the overuse of Persian literary devices. He went on to point out that Urdu poets had, in fact, produced all the literary embellishments found in Persian poetry. While Persian had given them the power of expressing through metaphors extremely complex and refined thoughts, it had also

Muhammad Husain Āzād, Vol. I & II (Karachi: Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdū, 1965); Muhammad Sadiq, *Āb-e Hayāt ki Himāyat Mith aur Dil-e Maqāmāt* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1973); Mas'ūd Hasan Rāṣid Adīb, *Āb-e Hayāt ka Tanqīdī Maqālā* (Lucknow: Kitāb Nāgar, 1964); and Frances W. Pritchett, *Notes of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹¹Reference not available. —Editor.

¹²Muhammad Sadiq, *Muhammad Husain Āzād: His Life and Works* (Lahore: West-Pakistan Publishing Co., 1974), p. 24.

made them prone to verbiage, obscure conceit and endless artifices. Moreover, poetry in this rich language was limited to a small number of themes which were fanciful and not realistic. All this could be remedied if Urdu poetry were clothed in "new kinds of jewellery and robes of honour of the current times that are tucked away in the safe boxes of the English."³³ To redress this situation he advanced a scheme of radical reform in the idiom of poetry.

The agenda articulated in the lecture was given a more elaborate form in his book *Āb-e Hayāt* (1880), the first history of Urdu literature, or rather Urdu poetry, which was, in any case, almost synonymous with Urdu literature at the time.³⁴ It is a significant improvement on the earlier *usūlīya* tradition—which merely gave impressionistic and often laudatory accounts of poets without any clear chronology, context, or critical perspective—in the sense that "... for the first time it presents Urdu poetry against some sort of historical background and gives critical assessments of the poets in something approaching a modern style."³⁵ It is a monumental effort in constructing a literary history and a poetics. Āzād divides the history of Urdu poetry into five periods, of unequal length and emphasis, and describes the main characteristics of each period in his own inimitable metaphorical style. There is no scope for a detailed discussion about *Āb-e Hayāt* here, but what needs emphasis is Āzād's readiness to write off a segment of Persian heritage in favor of English. The following statements are self-evident.

There are many thoughts and themes in English that our language cannot express. That is, the enjoyment they produce in the English language can't be fully conveyed in Urdu. Which in reality is a result of the weakness of the language, and this is a cause of the greatest shame for its native speakers.³⁶

³³Muḥammad Hussain Āzād, *Naṣm-e Āzād*, ed. Tabassum Kāshmiri (Lahore: Maktaba-e 'Āliya, 1899), p. 46.

³⁴"From early in the eighteenth century until about 1870 Urdu literature and Urdu poetry are virtually synonymous terms. Almost all prose was in highly stylized Persian, and what little Urdu prose there was, imitated this style of writing," Ralph Russell, *Hidden in the Lure: An Anthology of Two Centuries of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Viking, 1995), p. 181.

³⁵Ralph Russell, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 121.

³⁶Faruqi, *Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry*, p. 91.

It is an unhappy state of affairs that our poetry has become ensnared in the coils of a few trifling ideas: that is, romantic themes, carefree drinking of wine, creating illusory colours and scents without the rose or the rose garden, bewailing the calamity of separation, delighting in imaginary union, feeling an aversion to the world, and on top of this experiencing the oppression of the heavens. And the outrageous thing is that if we want to speak of some real matter, we express that very idea in metaphors—the result of which is that we can do nothing. My friends! I see that the exhibition hall of sciences and arts is open, and all the peoples have been displaying the handiwork of their literature. Don't you see at what level our language stands? Yes—you can clearly see—she lies there on the doormat!²⁷

Predictably, the views expressed by Āzād in his Anjuman lecture evoked a storm of protest. He was accused of rank capitulation to the British, of writing a language that was Urdu in external form but was derived from English in its content. He was reminded that Urdu had inherited the Perso-Arabic tradition and had incorporated Indian elements into it in such a way that it had been able to encompass all aspects of life as its *magmūn* or subject matter. And finally, he was told, poetry could not sustain itself and give pleasure without using similes and metaphors.²⁸ Āzād must have been hard put to respond to such questions, but there is no evidence, as the above extracts demonstrate, that he changed his opinion about Urdu poetry and poetics in any significant way. There are a number of such statements in *Āb-e Hayāt* that would be sheer delight to critics of Orientalism for showing how deeply the insidious power of Western hegemony ran in dazzling and seducing Eastern minds. However, it would be naïve to believe that a person of Āzād's prescience and insight, steeped in Persian, Arabic and Urdu scholarship was simply blinded by the new knowledge explosion from the West. The answer must be sought not simply in the popular postcolonial paradigm of Caliban-like mimicry, but in a more comprehensive framework of the literary impact-response paradigm. His family's stormy relationship with the British, the changed power equation after 1857, and changes in the nature of literary patronage—all these seem to have played their roles in influencing his views. But it appears quite reasonable to argue that his

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁸ Farrukhī, pp. 48–51.

overzealousness sprang from a genuine concern to purge Urdu poetry of what he thought were undesirable elements that had crept into it over a period of time, and to anchor it firmly in Indian soil. This also will explain his clear, though not elaborately worked out, nativist agenda in *Āb-e Hayāt*.

VII

Hālī (1837-1914), the first practitioner of theoretical criticism in Urdu, was a junior contemporary of Āzād. After spending his formative years in Delhi as a disciple of Ghālib, he went to Lahore where he worked in the Government Book Depot from 1870 to 1874. Hālī's responsibility there was to edit and amend textbooks which had been translated from English into Urdu. As a result, he became acquainted with a variety of works of English literature and literary criticism and of European philosophy and science. Hālī describes how, through this, he developed a relationship with English literature, and the prestige of Eastern literature, especially Persian literature, declined in his heart.³⁹ Elsewhere Hālī mentions how translation from English into Urdu, especially under the aegis of the Aligarh Scientific Institute and *Tabi'at-e Akhlāq*, transformed literary taste, with the result that the status of Persian literature fell considerably, and "the spirit of western imagining" was blown into Urdu literature.⁴⁰ It is only reasonable to assume that all these impressions and influences had gone into the making of his poetic and critical sensibility. His *Muqaddama Shī'r-o-Shā'irī*, which roughly translates as "Introduction to Poetry and Poetics," is a long essay that appeared in 1893 as a preface to his collection of poems. This long essay that later took the form of a book has remained, over the last century, the most influential work of literary criticism in Urdu. Though Hālī's thoughts in the *Muqaddama* are largely derivative, they have been put across with a force and conviction all his own, so much so that his considerable reputation as a poet seems to have been eclipsed by his stature as a critic and as the writer of the *Muqad-*

³⁹"Hālī," in *Nuqul: Āp-Bit Nambar*, ed. Muḥammad Tufail (Lahore: Idāra-e Farāgh-e Urdū, 1964), p. 284.

⁴⁰Hālī, *Majmū'a-e Naṣr-e Hālī* (Delhi: Maḥa'le Murtaẓā, 1890), p. 2., as quoted in *Hālī's Muqaddar: The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, trans. with a critical introduction by Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 6.

dama.⁴¹ The *Muqaddama* is divided into three sections. In the first section Hill discusses the role of poetry in earlier societies. Societies, he says, have their own effect on poetry. The evils of a society and the faults of a period may vitiate poetry, leading to the corruption of national morality. In a republic a poet can make great progress if he is not too popular. For the reform of poetry, however, it is necessary that only the highest and the most excellent examples of poetry be put before the public. In the second section Hill presents the ideas he derived from Milton. Poetry should have simplicity (*sadq*), should spring from emotion (*javb*) and should be based on truth (*asliyat*).⁴² However, as he begins to explain these concepts he entrap himself in what seems, from today's vantage point, a welter of contradictions, unexamined half-truths and ill-conceived formulations. The unqualified acceptance of certain notions of poetry prevalent in the Romantic and early Victorian period leads him to devalue aspects of the Urdu-Persian literary tradition. He finds fault with the ghazal for being artificial and obtuse, the *maqamat* for a lack of coherent plot and character development, the *qasida* for being full of hyperbole, and with *marjiya* for a lack of verisimilitude. He reprimands Urdu poets for merely imitating ancient poets and he exhorts them to desist from using lies and exaggerations in their poetry because these may have a profoundly negative impact on the people. In the third section he deals with the concept of natural poetry. Natural poetry, according to him, means poetry written in accordance with nature in both words and meaning. The words should be those of common speech and the meaning should be concerned with things of this world. He gives his illustrations of natural and unnatural poetry.

⁴¹For a detailed discussion of *Muqaddama*, see Laurel Steele, "Hill's *Muqaddamat*: The Creation of a Literary Attitude in Nineteenth Century India" in *Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 1 (1981), pp. 1-45.

⁴²Steele summarizes this section of the *Muqaddama* as follows: "Simplicity means that in both words and thoughts there should be simplicity. The thought should not be so refined and abstruse that it could not be understood by common people. The basis of poetry should be known things.... Poetry should inspire emotion (*javb*) in the hearts of its listeners. The poet, when he is reciting, should keep the thoughts of his listeners in mind, and his own natural emotions should be made apparent through his poetry. That poetry should be based on reality (*asliyat*) means its subject or the idea in it should be something that is present in actuality, and not made-up or imaginary. The similes and allegories should also be true—that is, not fictional." *Ibid.*, p. 30.

It is curious that Hālī does not mention Persian in a single one of his 83 chapter headings. Behind all his exhortations and advice there runs one underlying theme: the old world is gone and with that some of the old literary conventions have lost their relevance. In his view, poetry, as a reflection of society, must also change in response to the new forces let loose in India. That is why he calls for poetry that is true and natural. However, he failed to realize that the yardstick for evaluating Urdu literature must be its own, and that the concerns of Western literary theorists were not, necessarily, relevant to it. As one Urdu critic puts it, "Hālī was so profoundly influenced by Syed Ahmad Khan and so overawed by the West's intellectual onslaught that even those points that he could have illustrated quite easily by reference to Eastern literature have been explained by him through the works of the authors from the West."⁴³

The question of Hālī's English sources, as hinted at earlier, is an interesting one. Vahid Qur'āshī⁴⁴ and Mumtāz Husain⁴⁵ have dealt specifically with this subject to demonstrate that Hālī's borrowings and his readings of English sources leave much to be desired. It is still a matter of speculation whether Hālī was acquainted with Wordsworth's "Preface" to *The Lyrical Ballads*. The *Muqaddama* has a close resemblance to it. Like Wordsworth's "Preface," the *Muqaddama* was written as an introduction to Hālī's collection of ghazals. Moreover, Hālī's ideas about the use of everyday themes and of the language of common speech have a close affinity with Wordsworth's. It is difficult to believe that all this is a matter of sheer coincidence. In the final analysis it seems reasonable to conclude as Frances Pritchett does: "We cannot say how well Hālī controlled his English sources, and how much he was at the mercy of translators. But certainly he knew what he wanted to say, and went looking for English writers who would help him say it."⁴⁶

⁴³Sayyid Muḥammad 'Aqil, "Mashriqī Hālī par Maghrīb kī Nau-Adabiyātī Dab'ir," in *Ghālibnāma* (New Delhi), Vol. 23, No. 2 (July 2002), p. 187 [my translation].

⁴⁴Vahid Qur'āshī, ed., *Muqaddama Shēr-o-Shar'at* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1977).

⁴⁵Mumtāz Husain, *Hālī ke Shēr't Nazariyat: Ek Tanqidi Muqallā'a* (Karachi: Sanad Publications, 1988).

⁴⁶Pritchett, p. 131.

VIII

Thus, by the early decades of the twentieth century the Persian language and the knowledge system that emanated from it had both been slowly and gradually replaced by English and other indigenous languages, Urdu being one of them. These languages came to fill the literary-discursive space occupied earlier by Persian. Just one and a half centuries earlier, as Bayly observes, "... large numbers of Muslim, Kayastha and Khattri boys entered open educational institutions in the great Indo-Muslim cities to learn basic Persian...."⁴⁷ Now the hunger was for learning English to meet the current needs. Charles Trevelyan depicts this hunger most graphically in his treatise *On the Education of the People of India* (1838).⁴⁸ Syed Ahmad Khan, Āzād and Hāllī were able to discern that they were living in an age of transition and that vast changes were going to take place. They were men of great learning in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, but found the world radically changed after 1857. It effectively shook their confidence in their own culture and literary aesthetics. The earlier confidence of the poet and the writer which sprang from knowing their society and their place in it, was lost forever. It was replaced by an anxious relationship between the poet, his elusive patron(s) and readers. These three men tried to shore up some core elements of their culture and literature and to find some relevance for them in the changed environment, even while shedding what they thought were those elements that were merely decorative or even decadent. This was a huge task and they committed mistakes in their judgments, as men in an age of transition tend to do. But their mistakes do not take away from their singular achievements. The issues they grappled with have not yet lost their relevance. Their views are still discussed and debated vigorously in classrooms. They have

⁴⁷Bayly, p. 5.

⁴⁸"The passion for English knowledge has penetrated the most obscure, and extended to the most remote parts of India. The steam boats, passing up and down the Ganges, are boarded by native boys, begging, not for money, but for books.... Some gentlemen coming to Calcutta were astonished at the eagerness with which they were pressed for books by a troop of boys, who boarded the steamer from an obscure place called Comercolly [*sic*]. A Plato was lying on the table, and one of the party asked a boy whether that would serve his purpose. 'Oh Yes,' he exclaimed, 'give me any book; all I want is a book.' The gentleman at last hit upon the expedient of cutting up an old *Quarterly Review*, and distributing the articles among them." As quoted in Niranjana, p. 1.

not yet been supplanted by any radical rethinking in matters of the education system, literary historiography, and poetics and literary criticism in Urdu. □

Politics, Public Issues and the Promotion of Urdu Literature: *Avadh Akhbar*, the First Urdu Daily in Northern India

LAUNCHED IN 1858 from the Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow, *Avadh Akhbar* was the most lucrative journalistic venture of the famed North Indian publisher and print capitalist Munshi Naval Kishore and a great success with the Urdu reading public. At a time when most Urdu papers were short-lived, it remained in circulation up to the year 1950, its lifespan of almost a century covering a crucial period in the history of colonial India. In 1877 *Avadh Akhbar* (hereafter *AA*) became the first Urdu daily in northern India. It was to remain the only commercially viable daily newspaper in Urdu for a whole decade, until its first serious rival emerged in the form of the *Paisa Akhbar* (est. 1887) of Lahore, a paper emulating the concept of the British penny paper.¹ Exemplifying the early phase of commercialization in the Urdu newspaper trade, *AA* was read across a wide geographical region ranging from Delhi to Haidarabad and from Lahore to Calcutta. This essay traces the history of the paper's first

¹According to Muhammad Sadiq, the *Paisa Akhbar* marked a turning point in Urdu journalism and a dividing line between older and modern journalism in that it initiated the differentiation between the literary journal and the newspaper as a mere purveyor of news. M. Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 616. In actual fact, the matter is hardly that simple, for newspapers continued to include poetry and fictional writing in their columns. *AA* is a case in point. For the difficulties in providing a theoretically rigorous distinction between newspaper and literary magazine in the nineteenth century, see Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000), p. xv.

forty years, during which it made a distinct impact on the emerging Urdu public sphere. Outlining the growth, contents and policy of *AA*, it will look at both economic and human factors in the making of an outstanding popular success in nineteenth-century Urdu journalism.²

Munshi Naval Kishore (1836–95) is one of several eminent Hindu publicists who figure prominently in the history of nineteenth-century Urdu journalism. Following his higher education at Agra College, he went to Lahore to receive his training as a printer and journalist at the famous *Kōh-e Nūr* Press (est. 1849) of Munshi Harsukh Rā'ī (1816–90), the doyen of Urdu journalism in the Punjab.³ At the beginning of 1856 Naval Kishore returned to Agra to establish his own Urdu weekly, *Safir-e Agra*.⁴ His plans, however, were thwarted by political events. In September 1857 we find him back in Lahore where he assumed the editorship of *Kōh-e Nūr* and successfully saw the paper through the uprising of 1857. His loyalty towards the British at the time would be amply rewarded when he moved on to Lucknow in 1858—he was the first Indian to be granted a license to operate a printing press in the city after the “Mutiny.” Established under the name of *Maḡba'-e Avadh Akhbār* in 1858, the Naval Kishore Press (hereafter NKP) rose to great fame in the history of commercial and scholarly publishing in India with an unparalleled range of publications in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu.

Compared to other North Indian urban centers, Urdu journalism started late in Lucknow. This was due to the particular circumstance that, following a temporary closure of all printing presses in the city by Vājid 'Alī Shāh in 1849, conditions of strict censorship prevailed in Avadh. No sooner had the *nasabāt* come to an end through the British annexation of Avadh in 1856 than at least seven Urdu weeklies were launched in

² I am grateful to Christina Oesterheld for patiently assisting me in reading through the files of *AA*.

³ Munshi Harsukh Rā'ī, a Kayastha from Sikandarabad, had earlier served as editor to the *Jam-e Jamshed*, an Urdu journal of Meerut. At the instigation of the British he moved to Lahore in 1849 where, with the support of the Punjab Administration Board, he established his own press and launched the first Urdu newspaper in the Punjab. With a circulation of nearly 350 copies (1854) the *Kōh-e Nūr* remained for a long time the most influential Urdu paper in the province. Harsukh Rā'ī subsequently rose to a position of prominence in Lahore society.

⁴ *Safir-e Agra*, a weekly comprising twelve pages, was launched on 19 January 1856. Nādir 'Alī Khān, *Hindustani Press, 1856–1900* (Lucknow: Umar Pradesh Urdu Akademi, 1990), p. 286.

Lucknow within a year's time.⁵ The 1857 uprising, however, brought the city's thriving print and publishing industry to a complete standstill. The vacuum Naval Kishore encountered on his arrival in Lucknow in early 1858 and the initial absence of local competition in the newspaper trade certainly did much to enhance the early growth of *AA*. The paper's lasting and extraordinary success, however, must be attributed to a number of other factors.

The first factor was British patronage in the form of subscriptions and the overall support extended to the NKP. From the outset Naval Kishore entered into an intense business collaboration with the colonial administration, printing all kinds of government forms and registers. He not only held a monopoly in textbook printing in Awadh, but subsequently managed to get the lion's share of official patronage in the amalgamated North-Western Provinces and Awadh: by 1882 over 75 percent of British printing commissions went to his press, the remainder being shared by fifteen presses.⁶ A large proportion of the profits made from government-job work was reinvested in Oriental book publishing and some went into sustaining *AA*. The government, in its turn, patronized the paper by subscribing to a number of copies which were distributed to the schools and colleges in the provinces. If official statistics are a measure to go by, colonial patronage of the paper was not quite as substantial as some later voices made it out to be: With 50 out of 820 copies in 1877, 94 out of 732 copies in 1886, and 94 out of 521 copies in 1895, government subscriptions hardly ever exceeded twenty percent of the paper's total circulation.

⁵The most important was the *Jilim-i Laknau'i*, edited by Maulvi Muhammad Ya'qub of the Pirangi Mahal family. Details in Nadir Ali Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1992), pp. 294–305.

⁶*Proceedings of the Government NWP & Oudh, General Dept., May 1886*, p. 16.

⁷The circulation of *AA* during the nineteenth century never exceeded 850 copies. It has to be borne in mind, however, that circulation figures at no time reflect actual readership. Newspapers like *AA* were widely recirculated and frequently read out to groups of non-literate people in both private homes and public arenas. See my paper "Lucknows *Jalsa-i Takhik* Urban Elite, organisierte Handlungskompetenz und frühe 'associational culture' in Britisch-Indien," in *Handeln und Verhandeln, Kolonialismus, Transkulturelle Prozesse und Handlungskompetenz*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné (Münster: LIT, 2002), pp. 69–70; and also

The second success factor concerned the professional management of the paper. *AA* was one of the first Urdu papers to be run along sound commercial lines. This implied that the paper partly financed itself through advertisements. Compared to British newspapers at the time, which made larger incomes from advertising than from sales,⁹ the proportion of space given to advertisements was relatively small. A typical issue of *AA* in 1871, for example, comprised sixteen pages of which an average of four would be given to advertising. Subsequently advertising came to account for an increasingly important part of the paper's revenue. In 1879, the rate obtaining for occasional small advertisements was 2 annas per line and column. Rates for regular commercial advertisements depended on how often an ad was placed in the paper and ranged from Rs. 12 for insertion once a month to Rs. 60 for insertion six times a month.¹⁰ By that time *AA* carried regular advertisements for branded goods and for patent medicines such as the widely advertised Holloway's pills and ointments or the "celebrated medicines" of one Dr. De Roos, of which the publishing house acted as a sole distributor. Local firms such as Murray & Co., a large retail company selling wine and general merchandise, and the Shaikh Haji Muhammad Bakhsh Company, a contractor of tents and uniforms, started to place regular full-page ads in the paper. The NKP, of course, also used the paper as a cheap medium to extensively advertise and invite subscriptions for its own book publications. In the early days of *AA*, announcements of important publications such as Ghālīb's Persian *Kulliyāt* or his *Qatī'e Burhān* would feature prominently on its front page (*AA* of 1 January 1861). Later, such notices were relegated to the interior or back of the paper but still appeared so frequently that the Delhi-based *Nusrat-i-Akbbār* was prompted in 1876 to accuse *AA* of being totally "self-interested": "The editor has been instructed not to write any article beneficial to the public, but only to print reviews of the books [published by] the press."¹¹

Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 58–9.

⁹Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 16.

¹⁰See *Fihrist-e Kutub-e Maḥa'-e Mumukh Navākhshār* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1879), p. 4.

¹¹*Nusrat-i-Akbbār* of 1 August 1876; quoted in Imdād Ṣabīr, *Tārīkh-e Ṣaḥāfat-e Urdū*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Jadid Printing Press, 1953), pp. 97–8.

The third factor, to be discussed later, was the group of people who led the paper. *AA* had the distinction of being headed by a number of eminent editors who were scholars, poets or prose writers in their own right. This latter circumstance also accounts for the paper's influential role in the promotion of modern Urdu literature for, in the typical fashion of early Urdu papers, *AA* combined the functions of newspaper and literary journal. It promoted both poetry and prose writing and evolved into a forum for literary debate, attracting the contributions of eminent Urdu literati of the day. The press office of *AA*, then, was not only a place where information was generated, it was also a meeting point for the Urdu literary scene.

From Weekly to Daily: Growth and Development of *Asadul Akbar*

Whether it's because the study of a commercially produced newspaper does not fall within the purview of modern scholars of Urdu, or perhaps because of the scarcity of extant early issues,¹¹ *AA* has received surprisingly little attention outside the standard works on Urdu journalism. In giving a brief overview of the paper's growth and development, the following paragraphs will try to fill some lacunae and also refute some inaccurate claims concerning the paper's format, frequency and editorship. As with many early Urdu papers, there is some disagreement over the date of first publication: While several authorities on Urdu journalism maintain that the first issue of *AA* did not appear before January 1859, the late Amir Hasan Nūrānī, himself an authority on the NKP, asserts that on the closure of the firm's Kanpur press he chanced upon the first issue of the paper dating from 26 November 1858. Unfortunately the rare document was subsequently lent to a reputed Urdu scholar and could not be retrieved.¹² While there is no reason to disbelieve Nūrānī, later editorial notices appearing in the paper contradict his information and support the

¹¹The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna, holds issues of *AA* from 1866, 1869, 1870-2, and 1875. The OIOC, London, has in stock almost complete runs of the paper between 1875 and 1884. According to Amir Hasan Nūrānī, some files from 1862 and 1870 are kept in the Aivān-e Ghālib Library in Delhi.

¹²Amir Hasan Nūrānī, *Sandwich-e Mawāt Nasakh-e Mawāt* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), p. 136.

1859 date.¹¹ Most importantly, the issue of 8 January 1862 was marked as volume 4, no. 2, which clearly indicates the year 1859 for the first volume. This, however, does not altogether preclude the possibility that Naval Kishore did indeed launch a first issue in 1858. Given the many tasks he had to attend to on opening his press, he at first may not have been able to publish his new paper on the intended regular weekly basis. This would also explain why Nūriani maintains that *AA* was initially brought out on a fortnightly basis. As things stand, regular weekly publication of *AA* only took off a couple of weeks later, starting a fresh count with volume one in January 1859.

AA was initially a four-page weekly in the standard format of early Urdu papers, that is, 18 x 22 cm. Its frontispiece was adorned with a drawing of the Chattar Manzil and Farhat Bakhsh palace complex, evoking the erstwhile grandeur of *naubat* Lucknow. It is worth noting that the frontispiece in its layout bears a striking resemblance to that of the *Illustrated London News*, one of the most popular Victorian weeklies at the time (Figures 1 and 2). Appearing each Wednesday, *AA* was well received and during the following years successfully competed against the rapidly growing number of Urdu papers. By 1864 its size had increased to sixteen pages.¹² Simultaneously, the format was enlarged to 22 x 29 cm. So overwhelming was the success of *AA* that on opening his printing press in Kanpur in September 1865, Naval Kishore decided to bring out a local edition in the form of the *Kanpur Gacay*. It was edited by Muḥammad Ismāʿil, the manager of the firm's Kanpur branch. Within the next two years, however, communication between Lucknow and Kanpur improved to such an extent that the Kanpur edition was rendered superfluous. Accordingly, it was discontinued.¹³

¹¹*AA* of 22 December 1871, for instance, carried an editorial notice which referred to the paper's lifespan with the words "This is the thirteenth year of God's divine grace," pointing to 1859. A similar notice in *AA* of 2 January 1874 expressly stated that "In this factory in 1859 [a paper] called *Avad Akbār* was put into circulation."

¹²J.H. Garcin de Tassy, *La Langue et la Littérature Hindoustanie de 1850 à 1860*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie de Maisonneuve et Cie, 1864–69), p. 245. The French scholar's claim that by 1867 the size of *AA* had further increased to 24 pages (*ibid.*, 1867, p. 372) is inaccurate. The issues of 1871 still comprised no more than 16 pages on average.

¹³Garcin de Tassy, 1867, p. 373.



Figure 1

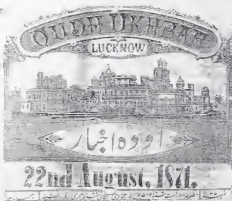


Figure 2

The next major step in the growth of *AI* illustrates the direct impact of government measures on the still volatile newspaper market. In 1871 the standard postage for newspapers was reduced from one anna to half an anna. With newspaper distribution depending almost entirely on the

colonial postal system, postage from the outset constituted a vital factor in the commercial history of "vernacular" papers. Nothing much had changed since 1822 when Harihar Dutt had solicited the government for free postage, complaining that the circulation of his weekly *Jam-e-Jahān Nama* had been "materially impeded and obstructed even in spite of my best exertions and efforts to extend it." This, Dutt maintained, was "in consequence of its being liable to payment of full postage, which has restrained many intending subscribers in the mofussil from patronising the said News Paper."¹⁶ The adverse effects of postage on circulation continued to be a vexing problem for Indian newspaper proprietors. So much so that in March 1869 Munshi Naval Kishore initiated a campaign for the reduction of postage for newspapers and periodicals and rallied a group of twenty-five influential newspaper proprietors and editors from all over North India, Calcutta and Bombay in drawing up a petition to the government. The petition at the time was rejected.¹⁷ Yet the government seems to have had second thoughts, for in 1871 it introduced a fifty-per-cent reduction in the standard postage. Not surprisingly, the measure gave an immediate boost to the Urdu newspaper trade. It not only led to "a striking increase"¹⁸ in the number of new launches, but also benefited well-established papers like *AA* which were able to attract larger numbers of subscribers. From August 1871 *AA* started to appear twice a week, and from May 1875 three times a week. Even after the reduction, postage continued to account for a considerable proportion of readers' expenses: In 1877 the annual cost for ordinary subscribers was Rs. 20 excluding and Rs. 30 including postage, postage thus comprising a third of the cost. Higher subscription rates of Rs. 40 and Rs. 50, respectively, obtained for the gentry and nobility. The provincial government at the time subscribed to 50 copies charged at ordinary subscription rates—Naval Kishore's attempt to introduce higher rates was rejected outright.

AA did much to enhance the spread of the newspaper reading habit among the aristocracy and educated middle class in the North-Western Provinces and Avadh. That the paper also enjoyed growing popularity

¹⁶Quoted in P. Thankappan Nair, "Origin of the Persian, Urdu and Hindi Printing and Press in Calcutta," *Indo-Iranica* 43 (1990), p. 35.

¹⁷See Stark, pp. 67–8.

¹⁸*Oudh Administration Report for the Year 1871–2*, p. 128. 'Abdu 's-Salim Khurshid, *Sahafat Pakistan va Hind Mith* (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-e Adab, 1963), p. 180.

among those sections of society who could not afford to subscribe to a newspaper regularly is borne out by the quaint testimony of a correspondent of *AA* who, writing from Hoshangabad in 1874, complained of the common malpractice of the servants of the post office who were in the habit of opening the covers of the paper addressed to him. Not only did they read it themselves, they circulated it among their friends, on which account the paper reached him very late.¹⁹ One eminent subscriber of *AA* who publicly welcomed its expansion and growing influence was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān. In the opinion of the great Muslim reformer, Munshi Naval Kishore was to be credited with having popularized the notion of a news magazine and created widespread public awareness for modern concepts of information among Urdu-speakers in the North-Western Provinces and Awadh.²⁰ In an article published in his own reformist journal, *Taba'at-i-Akhlaq* (est. 1870), Sir Sayyid expressed his hope to see *AA* expand even further:

Awadh Akhbar has been a very respected paper before and nothing can be added to it now. We hope that our contemporary journalists will imitate *Awadh Akhbar*, and as for Munshi Naval Kishore's magnanimity—God's blessings upon him—we hope that his paper will appear on a daily basis in the manner of the large renowned English newspapers. May God let it be so.²¹

The praise and good wishes were mutual for *AA* openly sympathized with Islamic modernism and the Aligarh Movement. It did its best to support *Taba'at-i-Akhlaq* when soon after its inception the paper faced severe opposition from the Muslim orthodoxy. The editor of *AA* at the time was Ghulam Muhammad Khān "Tapish," a long-standing supporter of Sir Sayyid. He not only reprinted many of the articles published in *Taba'at-i-Akhlaq*,²² but also adopted a policy of refusing to include in the

¹⁹*AA* of 16 October 1874. *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Punjab, North Western-Provinces, Oudh and Central Provinces (SVN)*, 1874, p. 493.

²⁰Syed Jalaluddin Haider, "Munshi Nawal Kishore (1836–1895) (Mirror of Urdu Printing in British India)," *Pakistan Library Bulletin*, Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 20.

²¹My translation. *Taba'at-i-Akhlaq*, 1 Jamādiu 'l-Ṣāni 1288 A.H., quoted in Khurshid, pp. 180–1.

²²For example, Sir Sayyid's influential review of William Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* was reprinted in the *AA* of 22 December 1871.

columns of *AA* any article or letter that took an overt stance against the great Muslim reformer.²³ As a result of this active support for the highly controversial reformist journal, *AA* and its proprietor in turn became a target for Sir Sayyid's orthodox opponents. As Ghulam Muhammad Khān informed Sir Sayyid in a confidential letter, on a visit to Kanpur, Munshi Naval Kishore had been summoned by the Deputy Collector, Maulvi Imdād 'Alī, and severely reprimanded for "bringing about the ruin of his paper by having employed a Christian editor." The allusion was to the many articles by Sayyid Ahmad Khān that *AA* used to reprint. Out of consideration for his enterprise in Kanpur, Naval Kishore could not but humbly submit to the scolding. Nevertheless, as the letter went on to report, the Deputy Collector had mounted a diatribe against the editors of both papers. Ghulam Muhammad Khān was eager to assure Sir Sayyid of Munshi Naval Kishore's unfailing friendship and respect, but also pointed out that the publisher was operating under many constraints. He finally urged Sir Sayyid to occasionally write to the publisher and assure him of their solidarity and common cause.²⁴

Eagerly anticipated by Sayyid Ahmad Khān, the shift of *AA* to a daily paper came in 1877. As was announced in a special supplement to *AA* on 23 May 1877, starting from 1 June 1877 the paper was to be published on a daily basis, initially for a six-month trial period. The bold venture, it was explained, followed public demand, for readers had for some time expressed their keen desire to receive information on a more regular, daily basis. Moral and financial support came forth from prominent citizens such as Lucknow's veteran printer-publisher Maulānā Hājī Harmain Sharfain, C.S.I., and Deputy Collector Rājā Jai Kishan Dās, C.S.I., the former secretary of Sayyid Ahmad Khān's British Indian Association. Extolling the generous contribution of Muḥammad 'Abdullāh Khān

²³See Ghulam Muhammad Khān's letter to Sir Sayyid, quoted in Mirza Muḥammad Riqvān, "Munshi Navalkishore ke Mun'aliliq Cand Munafarriq Bāzsh," *Naya Daur*, Vol. 3, Nos. 8–9 (1980), p. 232.

²⁴"Letter from Editor Oudh Akhbar to Syed Ahmad Khan" (undated), quoted in *Selected Documents from the Aligarh Archives*, ed. Yusuf Hussain (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967–), pp. 210–1. Given this overt support for Sayyid Ahmad Khan and *Takht-i-Takht-i-Akbar* expressed in *AA*, it remains a curious fact that in 1873–74 the NKP published a number of pamphlets authored by Maulvi 'Alī Baksh Khān, one of the most outspoken critics of Sayyid Ahmad's religious ideas, in which the latter was wholeheartedly condemned as a heretic.

Bahādur of Tonk, who had promised a yearly subscription of Rs. 100 in support of the venture, the paper hoped that other members of the local aristocracy and affluent class of *sa'bes* would follow suit (*AA* of 25 May 1877).

That *AA* could continue as a regular daily even after the six-month trial period is inextricably linked to the specific historic context, notably the urgent need for news that the Turko-Russian War (1877–78) and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80) were creating among North Indians, particularly among Muslims.²⁵ The paper provided extensive coverage of the wars. In the process, it introduced new features such as a special column entitled "*urphadimaiddān-e jāng ki āstatharīn khabarīn*" (Latest News From the Frontier/Battlefield) and inserted maps and illustrations. It is interesting to note that even though *AA* was never an illustrated newspaper, the visual element became increasingly important in its coverage especially of foreign news. Readers were, among others, regaled with large drawings of the Paris International Exhibition of 1878 (*AA* of 1 October 1878), of scenes from a Kabul war camp (*AA* of 28 February 1879), and of a Zulu warrior chief (*AA* of 31 May 1879).

The publication of *AA* on a daily basis was also sustained by a second, altogether different factor. Following the assumption of the editorship by Pandit Ratan Nāth "Sarshār" in August 1878, installment publication of his famous Urdu novel *Fasāna-e Āzād* was started. This in fact was the first time that serialized fiction was successfully introduced in an Urdu newspaper. A landmark in the history of modern Urdu fiction, *Fasāna-e Āzād* met with an unprecedented public interest which gave a great boost to the paper.²⁶ The survival of *AA* as a daily then rested on a combination of contemporary politics and modern prose fiction. Information and entertainment as the two sustaining factors can hardly be dissociated from one another for Sarshār cleverly incorporated current political affairs into his fictional narrative: Readers of *Fasāna-e Āzād* were made day-to-day witnesses of the hero Āzād's journey to Europe and his brave exploits in fighting the Russians on the side of his Turkish fellow-Muslims.

²⁵For a similar increase in sales of British daily newspapers provoked by the Turkish crisis, see Brown, p. 40.

²⁶This was rather late as compared to Britain where serial fiction was by no means an invention of the Victorian era but dates back to the eighteenth century. For the history of serialized fiction and installment publication in Britain, see Law.

Contents and Policy

AA was a product of the colonial experience in that it aimed at being a modern, professional news magazine. It emulated British models, its coverage including local, national and international news. In the name of spreading information and enlightenment among the Urdu reading public, *AA* aimed high, aspiring to be nothing less than the North Indian equivalent of *The Times* of London (*AA* of 1 January 1879). The news section made up the largest portion of the paper which prided itself in being able to cover "the whole world."

How was efficient news coverage achieved and what were the channels of information transfer? It was only three years prior to the inception of *AA* that the opening of the first telegraph lines in India had induced radical changes in the dissemination of news on the Subcontinent.²⁷ No modern news agencies, however, were operating in India before the year 1866 when Reuters started extending its services there.²⁸ Reuters, at all events, was too expensive at first for the majority of Indian editors to make use of its services. To ensure a rapid and steady flow of information, Munshi Naval Kishore therefore relied on a more traditional system of information distribution and built up his own network of correspondents posted in the major urban centers in India. Apparently their number was legendary, as suggested by a contemporary saying to the effect that in every district and every princely state could be found correspondents of the colonial government and of Munshi Naval Kishore.²⁹ A substantial

²⁷The rapid development of the telegraph system has been summed up by David Arnold: "From a few miles of line in 1851, telegraphs had been extended over 4,250 miles of India and linked forty-six receiving stations by the end of 1856; they ran from Calcutta to Agra and the northwest as well as connecting Bombay, Madras and Ootacamund. By 1865 there were 17,500 miles of telegraph lines, rising to 52,900 miles by the end of the century." *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 113.

²⁸Reuters set up its first office in Bombay in 1866. Further offices in Calcutta, Madras and Karachi followed, supplying the Indian press not only with foreign but also domestic information. The opening of the London-Bombay submarine telegraph cable in June 1870 greatly speeded up the transmission of news from England. Details in Graham Storey, *Reuters' Century 1851-1951* (London: Max Parrish, 1951), pp. 62-8.

²⁹Sabir, p. 112.

portion of the domestic and foreign news was also reprinted from English newspapers, particularly *The Times* of London, *The Pioneer* of Allahabad and the *Friend of India*. For news items regarding the Islamic world *AA* frequently made use of Persian and Arabic newspapers. At the same time, generating news and information was turned into a public, collective concern in which the participation of the readership was explicitly invited: Those who would regularly supply the paper with "important, recent, reliable and interesting news items"³⁰ were promised free copies of *AA* in return.

While introducing new concepts of modern informational culture, *AA* retained some features of the traditional newsletter as described by Michael H. Fisher.³¹ For one, there was the physical appearance of the handwritten and lithographed sheets. The paper retained the term "*akbbārāt*" for various categories of news; it adopted a Persianized vocabulary and cultivated a fairly ornate style. Published in two parts, on Wednesday and Friday, a typical issue of the paper in 1871 combined elements of traditional and modern newswriting in its standard departments. In the following overview of its contents the original Urdu has been retained to show how this intermingling of the traditional and the modern was reflected in the vocabulary used to label the various headings:

Anadī Akbbār in 1871

Part One ([issued] on Wednesday)	Part Two ([issued] on Friday)
1) General advertisements (<i>akbbārāt-e mu'awāzī</i>)	1) Lucknow
2) Poetry (<i>nagm</i>)	2) Telegraph news (<i>akbbārāt-e sir-karg</i>)
3) Letters to the Editor (<i>khay-bastīāt</i>)	3) Editorial (<i>aldiriyat</i>)
4) Proceedings of the Committee, ³² etc. (<i>muqābilāt kamīyat' naghmat</i>)	4) Correspondents (<i>khawaspāshayāt</i>)
5) Telegraph news (<i>akbbārāt-e sir-karg</i>)	5) Translations from the English (<i>tarjuma angrizī</i>)
6) Editorial (<i>aldiriyat</i>)	6) Reprints from other papers (<i>munqulāt</i>)
7) Correspondents (<i>khawaspāshayāt</i>)	7) Letters to the Editor (<i>khay-bastīāt</i>)

³⁰*Fihrist-e Kātib* 1879, p. 4.

³¹Michael H. Fisher, "The Office of Akbbār Nawīs: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1993), pp. 79–81.

³²I.e., the Lucknow Municipal Committee.

8) Translations from English newspapers (*tarjuma angrezi abkhārāt*)9) Miscellaneous (*abkhārāt muḥṭasaf*)10) Local news/Lucknow
(*lūka' abkhārāt*)8) Translations from the
Government Gazette (*tarjuma
gawarant gawā' wadī*)9) Special notifications
(*abkhārāt ghāir-ma'mū'āt*)

By 1878 telegraph news had moved to the front part of the paper, whereas the advertisement and local news sections had been relegated to the back. This increased emphasis on rapid coverage of domestic and internal affairs, while immediately provoked by the wars, also formed part of a wider policy shift in which *AA* slowly moved away from older conventions of assembling and presenting news, towards a new kind of "efficient" and professional journalism that was clearly based on Western models.

The local section of the paper was comparatively small. It provided information on current affairs in Lucknow. Next to news items on crimes or spectacular incidents, it included steady features such as the timetables of the Oudh Rohilkhand Railway (printed in Urdu and Devanagari script),¹³ legal notices, and the timings of court sessions. It also reported on a wide array of cultural events, including *muḥab'irāt*, public lectures and, most importantly, the activities of local civic associations such as the Jāma-e Taḥzīb or "Lucknow Reform Club" (est. 1868), of which Naval Kishore was a prominent member. Among *muḥab'irāt*, those organized by the NKP and taking place regularly on its premises were given special coverage. Reports on these gatherings, which attracted both well-known and minor Lucknow poets, at times read like an inventory of local poetic talent. The *AA* of 1 January 1878, for example, carried the following notice:

A special gathering of poets took place at the Avadh Akhbār Press on Monday. The occasion was graced by eminent poets among the noblemen of Lucknow. The pattern-line was "*as' it jeh hai is burā hote hai as' it
hote*" (True it is, indeed, that being good is bad). But since, due to the lack of time, the distinguished poets had only been informed one day in advance, there were very few ghazals that conformed to the pattern-line.

¹³The railway timetable had become an integral part of suburban newspaper content in London's local papers since the 1840s. In introducing this feature the *AA* obviously acted on official demand.

Indeed, most did not conform to it. The audience gained extreme delight from the compositions of Janāb Navāb Sirājū 'd-Daula Bahādur "Junān," Janāb Mirzā Haidar Shāhib "Afsān," Janāb Dārōgha Mīr Vajid 'Alī Shāhib "Tashkīr," Ra'īs of Lucknow, Janāb Munshī Ghāsanfar 'Alī Shāhib "Halīm," Mīr Afzal 'Alī Shāhib "Afzal," the sons of Janāb Tadhira 'd-Daula Munshī Mujaḥḥar 'Alī Khān Bahādur and other distinguished gentlemen. The honorable proprietor of the press was extremely grateful for the kindness of all the gentlemen.¹⁴

Besides its variety of news items, the paper contained articles on social and cultural topics, education and literature. In matters of social change, it generally adopted a reformist and progressive stance: For example, it urged the government to take strict measures against female infanticide (*AA* of 19 July 1870) and condemned the "sinful practice of polygamy" (*AA* of 26 July 1870).¹⁵ "Public welfare" or "*riḡbat-e 'am*" was a frequently invoked key concept in such articles. In the name of "*riḡbat-e 'am*" the paper gave vent to public grievances. Complaints ranged from the want of proper sanitary arrangements in Lucknow (*AA* of 15 March 1869)¹⁶ to the introduction of new taxes by the Municipal Committee which together with the government income tax were said "to have disgusted the people at large, and created a general disaffection and distrust towards the ruling power" (*AA* of 28 June 1870).¹⁷ While such reports professed to give voice to public discontent, they were generally moderate in tone and clearly testify to the paper's self-styled role as an intermediary between the government and the Indian people.

The political outlook of *AA* was characterized by loyalty towards the colonial state and support for its policies. Official British opinion considered the paper to be "moderate and respected" and early on noted "the ability" with which it was written.¹⁸ Yet at times this very moderation and

¹⁴My translation from the original Urdu quoted in Shāhīnī, p. 95. In the usual fashion, the poetic compositions presented at these gatherings were subsequently published by the NKP in collections called *Guldasta*.

¹⁵*SVN* 1870, p. 289.

¹⁶*SVN* 1869, p. 126.

¹⁷*SVN* 1870, p. 232.

¹⁸"Memo on the Vernacular Press for Upper India for 1876-77" and Priya Das' Report in: *Home Department, Public Proceedings, August 1879*, pp. 292-303, and February 1883, pp. 187-8 (B). *Oudh Administration Report for the Year 1869-70*, p. 145.

this cautious stance could border on a kind of opportunism which was suspicious even to British eyes. As an official report noted in 1881:

Of the Oudh papers the best is the Oudh Akhbar. This paper is, however, somewhat timid in tone, and rarely ventures to advocate strongly any important measures till satisfied that they are likely to find favor with Government. Though a consistent and admiring supporter of Lord Lytton's various measures, no sooner did it hear of his resignation than it hastened to advocate those changes in policy which seemed likely would take place under the new Government.³⁹

Following the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, *AA* became a prime target for the nationalist Urdu press, particularly once its proprietor Naval Kishore had openly joined ranks with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān's United Indian Patriotic Association and assumed a leading position in the anti-Congress movement.⁴⁰ It is difficult to dissociate political opposition from professional rivalry in the bitter attacks on *AA* that various Urdu journals started to indulge in at that time. The continuously large share of government patronage that Naval Kishore's firm and, with it, *AA* enjoyed was indeed prone to incite jealousy. The rival Urdu press invariably portrayed Naval Kishore as a sycophant of the colonial empire who in opposing the Congress was motivated by self-interest and servility alone. In the process, *AA* was declared unable to represent national interests. *Anand Paul* defamed the paper as a money-minded "*bania akhbar*,"

³⁹ *Report on the Administration of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, for the year ending 31 March 1881*, p. 359.

⁴⁰ There is a persisting myth, perpetuated in much biographical writing on Naval Kishore, that the publisher was a fervent supporter of the Indian National Congress and the Lucknow delegate to the inaugural session of the Congress held in Bombay in 1885. This could not be further from the truth. The Lucknow delegate was Munshi Gategi Prasad Varmā (b. 1863), the proprietor-editor of the rivaling Urdu journal *Hindustān* and an outspoken adversary of Naval Kishore in the arenas of local journalism and politics. The confrontation of the two men was staged around the 1892 Municipal Elections in which Naval Kishore acted as chief canvasser for the anti-Congress candidate Bābū Shīf Rām, whereas Gategi Prasad Varmā supported the Congress candidate Panjit Bishan Narāyan Dar. In 1893 the two men clashed again over the election of the Lucknow delegate to the Provincial Legislative Council. Details in Anand Shankar Singh, *Growth of Political Awakening in Uttar Pradesh, 1858-1900* (Varanasi: Vishwanidhyaya Prakashan, 1994), pp. 44-6.

while *Hindustān* accused it of consisting chiefly of "translations of articles abusive of natives" taken from the *Pioneer* and the *Civil and Military Gazette*.⁴¹ Gaṅgā Prasad Varmā's *Hindustān* maintained that *AA* "blindly supported government measures and proceedings in utter disregard of the interests of the people."⁴² *AA* in its turn claimed to have public opinion on its side and retorted that the public trusted the colonial government more than it did the seditious Congress and its organs. In lashing out their polemics the pro-Congress papers deliberately overlooked the deeper motives of Naval Kishore's opposition to the Congress. No doubt the publisher had to protect his commercial interests and was careful not to endanger business relations with his major customer by publishing anti-British propaganda in his paper, but to narrow his motivation down to economic dependence is certainly oversrating the case.⁴³ *AA* was not a loyalist paper by constraint but by choice. It firmly believed in the benefits of colonial rule. Yet loyalty and support of colonial rule, as understood by the proprietor and editors of *AA*, did not automatically exclude a critique of government. True to its claim of representing public opinion, the paper was on occasion quite capable of articulating dissonant "native" views. C. A. Bayly has aptly described its stance as "covert criticism of British rule in Hindustan along the lines of old patriotism, but in the voice of unalloyed loyalism."⁴⁴

The coverage of the visit to Lucknow of the Prince of Wales in May 1876 provides a characteristic example of this stance. The paper not only published numerous poetical compositions in honor of the distinguished visitor but also, in its issue of 28 May 1876, contained a critical piece under the heading "Can the Indian Subjects be Content with the British Government?" which openly voiced its dissatisfaction with an administration that failed to cater to the basic needs of a populace assailed by poverty and hunger.⁴⁵ In the issue of 6 March 1876 Munshi Naval Kishore, after a personal consultation with Vājid 'Alī Shāh in Marā Būrj, voiced his protest against the treatment meted out to the former King of Avadh

⁴¹Quoted in Singh, pp. 25 and 65.

⁴²*Hindustān* of 6 July 1890, *SVN* 1890, p. 452.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 91.

⁴⁵Cf. Garcin de Tassy, 1876, pp. 8–12.

by the British. *AA* also liked to pose as a spokesman of the Indian-language press and frequently took up its cause in its columns. The issue of 25 August 1874, for example, carried a complaint about the government's double standards in dealing with the English and Indian-language press, stating that it was "extremely unjust that, while Government grants special indulgences to editors of English newspapers, and exalts them to high offices in the public service, it should confer no such favors on the editors of vernacular newspapers."⁶⁶ No doubt careful sifting of *AA* will produce further such examples. A content analysis and assessment of its socio-political profile and public impact remains to be undertaken. Against the backdrop of Munshi Naval Kishore's active involvement in national politics, such an investigation will also have to address the intricate question as to what extent the political profile of *AA* was shaped by its proprietor rather than its various editors. In any case, it should be of great interest to see how the leading Urdu daily of northern India was walking the tightrope between loyalty to the colonial government and the increasing exigencies of Indian nationalism.

What can be safely said at this point is that from around 1890 the circulation of *AA* was in decline. By the turn of the century the paper had lost much of its former appeal. According to Bālmukund Gupta, the influential editor of the politically trenchant Hindi journal *Bhāratmitra*, this was due to the paper's very refusal to engage in nationalist politics. In resisting modernization and refusing to formulate its own distinct "policy," the veteran journalist opined, *AA* had failed to keep up with the tide of the times. Moreover, despite the paper's monetary resources and its excellent staff, the selection of English news items was "nonsensical," and their translations into Urdu "barely intelligible." Writing in 1905, Gupta concluded: "[*AA*] is exactly the same as it was twenty years ago and for this very reason it has not established a reputation for itself in the newspaper world during these past twenty years. Most newspaper readers won't even know its name."⁶⁷ To this critical observer at the beginning of the new century *AA* no longer met the needs of modern journalism, but had become a "*lahir ka faqir*" ("*lahir kā faqīr*") and a "*besund ka hatthī*" ("*bī-sund kā haṭṭī*").

⁶⁶ SVN 1874, p. 355.

⁶⁷ My translation. Bālmukund Gupta, *Gupta-Nibandhsamālā*, eds. Jhabarmal Sharma and Banārsidās Chaurvedi (Delhi: Gaurav Gāthā Saṅgam, 1994), pp. 262–3.

Promoting Urdu Literature: Editors and Contributors

The self-proclaimed aim of *AA* was to work towards the progress and welfare of India by informing and educating the Indian public through a broad news coverage. Yet at the same time the paper also assumed the function of a literary journal. It promoted both poetry and prose writing, covered literary events, announced new publications and provided a forum for literary debate. While the paper attracted the contributions of some leading Urdu literati from outside Lucknow, its role in the promotion of Urdu literature and the development of a modern prose style goes specifically to the credit of a number of eminent intellectuals among its editors. According to Šibiri, no other Urdu paper of the period boasted such an illustrious range of editors as *AA*.⁴⁸ While some of them were already well-known figures in the world of literature and learning when they joined the paper, others used *AA* as a stepping stone in their future careers as publicists and writers.

Although we have a fair picture of the various personalities associated with the editorship of *AA*, to establish a definite chronology of the paper's editors remains problematic. Since there was no formal declaration of the editor on the front cover of *AA* and since, according to common practice, editorial pieces generally remained unsigned, their names can only be gleaned from references within the paper (a difficult task given the scarcity of extant issues) or from secondary sources. With many contradicting statements standing in the way, the following account can only be tentative.⁴⁹ Equally, given the scarcity of extant issues for the period 1859–1875, for the time being we can only look at the kind of intellectuals that *AA* was able to attract. To assess the nature and quality of their contribution and the way in which their writings helped to shape the distinct profile of *AA* remains subject to the future availability of source material.

The first issues of *AA* were almost certainly edited by Munshi Naval Kishore himself. However, he was soon forced to delegate this time-consuming task to others. In 1859 Maulvi Hādi 'Alī "Ashk" (d. 1865) was appointed the first formal editor of *AA*. Born in a family of reputed scholars in the *qaṣba* of Bijnor, Hādi 'Alī "Ashk" had been educated at the

⁴⁸Šibiri, p. 59.

⁴⁹The following paragraphs draw largely on Šibiri and on Akbar Haidari, "Munshi Navalkishor aur *Asadul Akhbar*," *Naya Daur*, Vol. 35, Nos. 8–9 (1980), pp. 30–47.

Lucknow Madrasa Nizāmīya before he went on to serve the Muḥammadī Press of Hājī Ḥamzain Sharīfain, one of the earliest and most famous private printing presses in *nuwaḥ* Lucknow.³⁰ Ashk was an eminent scholar of Arabic and Persian, a master calligrapher and a poet who excelled in the art of composing chronograms (*tarīkh-gō*). He was a *shagird* of Navāb Fathu 'd-Daula Mirzā Muḥammad Raqā 'Barq' in whose company he spent some time at the court in exile of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh in Matia Burj. Ashk joined the NKP in 1858 as a calligrapher, but on account of his vast expertise was soon promoted to the double position of editor of *AA* and head proofreader in the firm's lithographic department. While editor of *AA* he prepared the edition of Ghālib's collected Persian verse *Kulliyāt-e Ghālib* (Lucknow: NKP, 1863) and prepared the calligraphy of a widely acclaimed large-letter edition of the Qur'ān, published posthumously as *Qur'ān Sharīf Jalī Qalam* (Lucknow: NKP, 1870). Due to his failing health he had to abandon the editorship of *AA* in 1864.

It is not clear who took over after him. According to Garcin de Tassy, Munshi Shiv Parshād, the manager of the NKP, assumed the editorship in 1864. The French scholar, however, may have confounded the tasks of press manager and editor. He certainly made a rather consequential mistake in confounding Shiv Parshād with his namesake Rājā Shivprasād of Benares, the eminent educationist and textbook author, who, ever since, has been erroneously associated with the editorship of *AA*.³¹ Munshi Shiv Parshād, whose background remains obscure but for his origin in a distinguished Lucknow family, had originally been hired as a calligrapher for *AA*. By 1862 he had become manager of the NKP, a position in which he served the publishing house until his death in the late 1890s. Shiv Parshād was a poet of Urdu who adopted the *sakhalīy* "Wahbī" and has a *Kulliyāt-e Wahbī* (Lucknow: NKP, 1880) to his credit. Specimens of his verse frequently appeared in *AA*.

According to an editorial notice published in a later issue of *AA* it was Mufti Fakhr 'd-Dīn Aḥmad "Fakhr" Lakṇawī (d. 1892) who took over the editorship from Maulvi Hādī 'Alī in 1865.³² The son of the reputed

³⁰For an anecdote illustrating his superior skills as a calligrapher, see Abdal Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhr Husain (London: Paul Elek, 1975), p. 105–6.

³¹Cf. Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Littérature Hindoue et Hindoustanie*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., (Paris: Adolphe Labitte, 1871), pp. 268–73.

³²*AA* of 2 January 1874, quoted in Šābiṭ, p. 58.

Firangi Mahal scholar Maulānā Zafar Ahmad, Fakhrū 'd-Dīn had himself been educated at Firangi Mahal and gained distinction for his remarkable rhetorical skills and his expertise in Islamic law. Like his predecessor, Fakhrū 'd-Dīn, while serving as editor of *AA*, assisted the publishing house in various tasks, particularly as a proofreader and translator of Persian texts. At Naval Kishore's instance he prepared the first Urdu translations of al-Ghazzālī's *Kīmīyā-e Sa'ādāt* and the *Tafīr-e Husainī*, a Qur'ān commentary by the fifteenth-century Persian moral philosopher Husain Vā'iz Khān. Written in fluid and lucid style, both texts were to assume special importance in the religious and moral instruction of Muslim women.³³

Fakhrū 'd-Dīn did not remain editor of *AA* for long. In 1866 he was succeeded by Muḥammad Mehdi Husain Khān, the ex-proprietor of the Riyāz-e Nūr Press (est. 1851) of Multan and former editor of an Urdu weekly of the same name. Apparently Mehdi Husain Khān had been forced to close down his press in 1856, following a sentence of imprisonment of several years. He joined *AA* after his release from jail.³⁴

In 1867 Mehdi Husain Khān in turn was succeeded by Maulvi Raunaq 'Alī (1846–76), a scholar and poet of Persian and Urdu who wrote under the pen names "Afsūn" and "Raunaq," respectively. The son of a *saluqdar* of Barabanki district, Raunaq 'Alī had come to Lucknow in 1859 to receive his higher education in Islamic learning. He was initially employed as a proofreader for *AA* but was soon promoted to the position of editor. Naval Kishore seems to have thought highly of him for in 1870 he sent him to Patiala to oversee the establishment of a new printing press in the princely state. From there Raunaq 'Alī launched the *Patiala Akhbar* in

³³Published as *Hikr-e Hidāyat* (Kanpur: NKP, 1866), the translation of *Kīmīyā-e Sa'ādāt* was to figure among the books recommended especially for women in the standard works on Muslim female education, i.e., Aḡāf Husain Hālī's *Majālis-e 'n-Nisā'* and Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī's *Bihisht-i Zuhūr*. The Urdu version of the *Tafīr-e Husainī*, entitled *Tafīr-e Qadīr* (Lucknow: NKP, 1879–80) headed the list of books that Thānavī deemed suitable for women. Details in Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 46 and Barbara D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 576–8.

³⁴*AA* of 2 January 1874, cited in Šābirī, pp. 58–9. For *Riyāz-e Nūr*, see also Khān 1991, pp. 259–65; and Khurshid, p. 123.

October 1871 at the request of the Maharaja of Patiala. He died in 1876 at the early age of thirty.¹⁵

A new era dawned for *AA* when, in 1870, Maulvi Ghulām Muḥammad Khān (d. 1904) assumed the editorship of the paper. A native of Delhi, he had spent part of his youth in the company of the Nawab of Patnauri and subsequently gained experience as a journalist and editor in Meerut and other places. Ghulām Muḥammad Khān was a pupil of Mirzā Ghālib and composed poetry in Persian and Urdu under the pen name "Tapish." During the eight years of his editorship *AA* thrived.¹⁶ Relations between him and Munshi Naval Kishore, which for the longest time had been amiable, took a dramatic turn in 1876, when, after a supposedly serious altercation between the two men, Ghulām Muḥammad Khān was dismissed. What prompted the dispute is not known. It may have had to do with Ghulām Muḥammad Khān's editorial policy, notably his overt support of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān's reformist paper *Tahtūn Akhlāq* which, as noted earlier, caused Munshi Naval Kishore some embarrassment. At all events, it was none other than Sir Sayyid who personally came to the editor's rescue: in an article appearing in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* of 29 September 1876 he expressed his deep regret over Ghulām Muḥammad's dismissal and pointed out that Naval Kishore had carelessly let go of one of the most capable editors of his paper, to whom *AA* owed its entire success.¹⁷ The letter did not fail in its purpose: Ghulām Muḥammad was promptly reinstalled in his capacity as editor. Yet, he did not remain with *AA* for much longer; several months later he decided to resign as editor and leave the paper for good. In May 1877 he informed the readers of *AA* that having devoted all his energy to the paper for the past eight years and having ruined his health and eyesight in the process, he was to quit *AA* and start his own paper *Mushir-e Qaiṣar-e Hind* instead.¹⁸

There is a rather dubious claim, probably going back to Garcin de Tassy, that, following Tapish, for a short period Maulānā Sayyid Amjad 'Alī "Ashhari" (b. 1851) took charge of the paper.¹⁹ This claim is not sub-

¹⁵Garcin de Tassy, 1876, pp. 136–7.

¹⁶Apparently Munshi Fida 'Alī "Aish" was assistant editor at the time. Nūrānī, p. 74.

¹⁷The article is reprinted in Khurshid, p. 182.

¹⁸For Tapish, see Šābirī, pp. 99–104.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 104–6.

stantiated by biographical accounts on Ashhār.⁶⁰ Indeed, it would seem strange that this distinguished scholar of Persian and Arabic should give up his high administrative post in the state of Bhopal and move to Lucknow. In January 1881 Ashhār established his own printing press *Amjad al-Maḥṣa'* in Bhopal from where he launched the journal *Dabṭer-e Maḥṣa'*. A prolific poet and writer, Ashhār made an important contribution to historiographical and biographical literature in Urdu.

Mention has already been made of the next and most famous editor of *AA*, Pandit Ratan Nārḥ "Sarshār" (1846–1902). If *AA* must be credited with having "launched the career of one of the most important prose fiction writers in Urdu,"⁶¹ it was Sarshār who, in turn, brought about the heyday of the paper's fame. Born in a Kashmiri Brahmin family settled in Lucknow, Sarshār received his education at Canning College and later took up employment as a school teacher. He had for some time contributed articles to various journals, particularly to Sayyid Sajjād Husain's satirical journal *ʿAṣad-e Panī* (est. 1877), when Naval Kishore appointed him as editor of *AA* on 10 August 1878. Apparently, Sarshār had been introduced to Naval Kishore by the Director of Public Instruction R. T. H. Griffith and employed with a view to counteracting the fierce attacks on *AA* that *ʿAṣad-e Panī* had started to indulge in at the time.⁶² It comes as no surprise that Sarshār's change of sides did little to alleviate the tension between the two papers. On the contrary, the publication of *Faṣṣa-e ʿAṣad* and the ensuing boost it gave to the circulation of *AA* provoked jealous attacks and bitter criticism from *ʿAṣad-e Panī*. The result, according to Sadiq, was "an open war between the two papers, which, after a crescendo of abuse and whacking blows on both sides, resulted in an honourable truce."⁶³ This is not quite accurate, for the attacks continued throughout the 1880s: In August 1880 the *ʿAṣad-e Panī* accused *AA* of being an anti-Muslim paper. In 1886, the serialized publication in *AA* of

⁶⁰See, e.g., Salim Ḥamid Rizi, *Urdu Adab ke Taraqqi Mein Bhopal ke Hissah* (Bhopal: Alavi Press, 1965), pp. 174–6.

⁶¹C.M. Naim and Carla Petesvich, "Urdu in Lucknow/Lucknow in Urdu," in *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, ed. Violette Graff (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 171.

⁶²Firoz Mookerjee, *Lucknow and the World of Sarshar* (Karachi: Saad Publications, 1992), pp. 57–8; Ram Babu Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature* (992; New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990), p. 325.

⁶³Sadiq, p. 418.

Sarshār's novel *Sair-e Kohist*, a titillating narrative about a young Nawab's illicit affair with a low-caste woman, prompted *Asad's* *Panl* to publicly urge the government to take legal action against Naval Kishore for publishing a "very obscene" novel in a paper delivered to countless schools in the province.⁴⁴

Fasāna-e Āzād was published in installments in *AA* from 13 August 1878 to January 1880.⁴⁵ It started out as a series of humorous sketches (*parāfat*), published in loose succession. With its vivid and humorous portrayal of contemporary social life in Lucknow, it took the reading public by storm and, from January 1879, was published at daily intervals. While Sarshār's claims to *Fasāna-e Āzād* being a "modern novel" remain controversial,⁴⁶ its publishing pattern marked the breakthrough of a new narrative genre in Urdu—the serialized novel. As the first piece of original fiction in Urdu written expressly for publication in a newspaper, *Fasāna-e Āzād* broke new ground: For one, it was a text conceived in installments, demanding self-contained units which were sufficiently barbed with suspense to hook the reader to the plot before he was relegated to the next issue of the paper by the inevitable "*baqt ā'inda ...*" ("to be continued ..."). Daily intervals imposed enormous pressure on the writer. The regular doses of opium that Sarshār was allegedly supplied with by the publisher may be a reflection of this. More important than the demands that the new mode of writing put on the author, however, was the new form of reader-writer interaction prompted by serial publication in a paper. Reader reaction to *Fasāna-e Āzād* was vivid, testifying to the existence of a critical literary public that was eager to discuss the notion of realism in literary fiction. Readers of *AA* sent in letters of criticism or suggestions to which Sarshār readily responded with comments or ad hoc modifications in the plot of his narrative.⁴⁷

⁴⁴*Asad's Panl* of 20 May 1886, *SVN* 1886, p. 406.

⁴⁵For the publishing history of *Fasāna-e Āzād*, see Mookerjee, pp. 78–80. As Mookerjee points out, the common notion that the novel was published in *AA* from December 1878 to December 1879 is based on an incorrect statement given in the first printed edition of 1880.

⁴⁶For a discussion of *Fasāna-e Āzād* under this aspect, see, e.g., Mookerjee, pp. 87–97, Ralph Russell *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature, A Select History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 87–92, and M. Asaduddin, "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 16 (i), 2001, pp. 84–6.

⁴⁷Mookerjee, pp. 102–33.

As R. L. Patten has pointed out in the context of the unprecedented success of Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, serial publication was a chief means of democratizing and enormously expanding the book-reading and book-buying public in Victorian England.⁶² In India, too, if much later than in Europe, serialized fiction became a staple and important part of literary magazines and periodicals. Its wider impact on the development of modern fiction and the growth of the reading public in North India still awaits study.

Sarshār contributed to the success of *AA* not only with *Faislā-e A'zād*, but with numerous articles on literary, educational, political and social themes in which he advocated progressive thought, enlightenment and modernity along the lines of what was called the "New Light." In his first editorial he laid out the editor's tasks as fourfold, notably (1) to serve his countrymen and lead them to prosperity, (2) to teach them to improve their ways, (3) to bring Indian views to the notice of the government and (4) to "illuminate with the radiance of the sun of refinement the dark chambers of the heart of those who languish in the pitch darkness of unfathomed ignorance, begging for light."⁶³ Accordingly, under his editorship increased coverage was given to social reform issues. His editorials reflect a particular concern with education and the status of Indian women. In their poignant and sometimes humorous literary style, they, moreover, gave a new dimension to journalistic prose writing in Urdu and assumed the function of a model. Sarshār could self-mockingly pose as an "inveterate hemp smoker" who in a fictitious letter to the proprietor of *AA* complained about the outrageous articles against drug-smoking and drinking with which the paper's new editor had driven half of Lucknow's population out of the city. He could equally well address the ailments of society in a more serious manner, never losing sight of his aim to bring the "New Light" to his compatriots.

Sarshār resigned from the editorship of *AA* on 1 February 1880 but remained attached to the NKP for some time to come. His novels *Faislā-e Jadid* (later published in book form as *Jām-e Sarshār*) and *Sair-e Kohūr* appeared in serial publication as special supplements to *AA* in 1880 and 1886, without, however, enjoying the same kind of success as *Faislā-e A'zād*. Sponsored by Naval Kishore, Sarshār was able to return to his fasci-

⁶²Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 45.

⁶³Quoted in Mookerjee, p. 58.

nation with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which had already inspired *Fasāna-e Aḥad*, and complete a long-cherished project of preparing an Urdu version of that great picaresque novel. His *Khudā'ī Fawjdar* was published from the NKP in 1894.⁷⁰

It is difficult to reconstruct the various editors of *AA* after Sarshār, the reason being a shift in the paper's organizational structure. In the issue of 11 February 1880 it was announced that in future the NKP would take charge of the paper and no formal editor would be appointed. Instead, a group of "excellent and experienced persons" would be employed to run the paper.⁷¹ How strictly this policy was adhered to cannot be said. Among those subsequently associated with the editorship were Ghulām Ḥasnain Qadr Bilgrāmi (d. 1884), Maulvī Aḥmad Ḥasan "Shaukat" Mērāṭhī, Mīrzā Ḥairat Dehlavī and Munshi Džhī Parshād "Sihṛ." By far the most outstanding figure on the editorial staff during the period, however, was 'Abdu 'l-Ḥalīm Sharar (1860–1926), the great Urdu essayist and cultural historian of Lucknow. Having spent his early childhood in Lucknow, in 1860 Sharar joined his father at the court in exile of Vajid 'Alī Shāh in Marja Burj, from where he contributed his first articles to *AA*. When, in 1880, he returned to Lucknow in search of a job, he was promptly employed by Naval Kishore as assistant editor at a monthly salary of Rs. 30. With Sharar as editor, *AA* went a step further in according Urdu prose writing a prominent place in its columns, and also gave increased coverage to subjects of cultural and social interest. Contributing articles on a great variety of topics, Sharar remained with *AA* until at least 1884, when we went to Haidarabad as a special correspondent of the paper. Soon after, he started his own monthly magazine *Dilgulāz*.⁷²

Next to its formal editors, *AA* also attracted the contributions of eminent Urdu literati, not least because it was among the first Urdu

⁷⁰Meekerjee, p. 229.

⁷¹*AA* of 11 February 1880, quoted in Khurshid, pp. 184–5. This also explains why from 1883 onward the SVN lists Munshi Shīr Parshād, the manager of the NKP, as the editor/publisher of *AA*.

⁷²Sharar's famous literary controversy with Pandit Brajnarāyaṇ Cakbast over the foremost *magnum*-writer of their times did not, as sometimes claimed, take place in *AA* but in the columns of *Dilgulāz* and *Amud Pan* in 1905. The NKP, however, published the debate in book form as *Mubāhaz-e Gulab-e Narm, Ya'ni Ma'raka-e Cakbast wa Sharar* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1913).

papers able to offer remuneration to its contributors. Unfortunately the sources are silent as to the customary amounts paid. Inviting "useful, excellent and interesting articles written in idiomatic and fluid English or Urdu," notices in the paper made a discrete promise of *kāfī mu'āwaza* ("adequate compensation"). The best known outside contributor in the 1860s was none other than Mirzā Ghālib who submitted articles on a number of topical themes. Ghālib from the outset was a keen reader of *AA*. His correspondence suggests that within the first year of its existence *AA* was already circulated and read by the Urdu intelligentsia across a wide geographical region. When, in November 1859, Ghālib's friend and publisher Munshī Shiv Narāyan "Ārām" forwarded him a copy of *AA* from Agra, Ghālib returned it with the comment that there was no need to waste postage since he already received the paper through his cousin Zayī'u 'd-Dīn Khān who subscribed to it.⁷¹ Several months later, in a letter to Munshī Naval Kishore dated 18 July 1860, Ghālib announced his own subscription to *AA*.⁷² About to enter into a publishing agreement with Ghālib, Naval Kishore did not deem it suitable to ask the venerable poet for payment and started sending him the paper free of charge. In a letter to 'Alā'ī dated 13 December 1863 Ghālib, who was in continuous financial distress at the time, gratefully acknowledged the savings of Rs. 24 that his "respected friend" Naval Kishore had thus afforded him. "True," he hastened to add with his customary pride, "I send forty-eight stamps every year to cover the postage."⁷³

Among Ghālib's *shagird* who contributed to *AA* we find Ghulam Ḥusnān Qadr Bīlgrāmī (for whom, incidentally, Ghālib had secured employment at the NKP in 1861), Hargōpāl Tufā, and Navāb Mardān 'Alī Khān "Ra'nā" (d. 1879). The latter, a *sa'ib* of Murabadad, was a regular contributor to the paper in the 1860s and continued to write for it even after his rise to the position of Chief Minister in Jodhpur State in 1870. The way in which these representatives of Urdu literature adopted the modern medium of the newspaper to publicly expound their views not only on literary but also social and political affairs, to either engage in a critique of colonialism or to extol the benefits of Western civilization,

⁷¹Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, eds. and trans., *Ghālib, 1797–1869: Life and Letters* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 120.

⁷²Kāqim 'Alī Khān, "Ghālib aur Munshī Navālkishūr," *Naye Daur*, Vol. 35, Nos. 8–9 (1980), p. 140.

⁷³Russell and Islam, p. 395.

deserves to be explored in greater detail. *AA* also had a foreign correspondent in London and counted among its regular contributors the eminent Orientalist scholar and linguist Edward Henry Palmer (1840–83). Palmer, a Fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge, not only had an excellent command of Arabic and Persian, but was fluent in Urdu to a degree that he himself composed poetry. He contributed articles and poetical pieces to *AA* from the early 1860s.⁷⁹

Finally, and although it falls outside the time frame of this paper, a claim frequently raised in Urdu sources shall be addressed here, since it concerns no less famous a literary personality than Munshi Premchand. The claim that Premchand was counted among the paper's editors in the twentieth century is not supported by any of the standard biographies on him. In 1914 Premchand actually declined an offer to join the editors of *AA*. The busy professionalism reigning in the press office of a daily newspaper did not suit his disposition. As he explained to his friend Dayānārāyan Nigam:

Here, even though I am a slave, I have a lot of freedom, for I have no boss sitting on my head nor am I answerable to anybody. That's why I feel free. And I shudder to think of the daily office routine of ten-to-five, with constant mental exertion, and a paper to be published daily. I don't think I can do it. My literary work here is like a pastime; it would then become a profession.⁸⁰

Premchand, however, did become associated with the NKP much later, when he was appointed editor of the influential Hindi literary journal *Mādhuri* in 1927. In this position, he may well have contributed occasional pieces to *AA*.

⁷⁹It is not clear whether Palmer himself served as a semi-official correspondent to *AA*. A notice appearing in the *AA* of 22 August 1871 may well have been a form of self-praise: "The English Correspondent of the 'Oudh Akhbar' had bestowed great praise on the poetry of Mr. Edward Palmer ... He writes that Mr. Palmer composes excellent and delectable verses in Qasaid which have extorted praise from the Arabic poets." Quoted in Ram Babu Saksena, *European and Indo-European Poets of Urdu & Persian* (Lucknow: Newul Kishore Press, 1941), p. 316. For Palmer, see also Garcin de Tassy, 1864, pp. 245–6.

⁸⁰Amrit Rai, *Premchand: His Life and Times*, trans. from the Hindi by Harish Trivedi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 90.

Conclusion

This paper, while giving a preliminary overview of the rich material contained in *AA*, could only hint at some of the issues raised by the study of the most influential and widely-read Urdu newspaper in nineteenth-century colonial India. *AA* merits much closer analysis for it offers a prime example of how, under the impact of colonialism, modern informational culture took shape in the Urdu public sphere, while at the same time the forum for literature and literary discourse expanded into a new medium that was available to the general public across various regions and communities. As pointed out by M. Asaduddin, in engaging in an "intellectual-cultural-literary encounter" between East and West, periodicals and papers like *AA* had a wider bearing on colonial society, in that they became "a vibrant and contested site for negotiating the terms of colonial modernity."⁷⁷ Perhaps one of the most fascinating points of investigation in this context is provided by the ongoing dialogue that *AA* kept up with its readers and subscribers. Official patronage notwithstanding, in order to not only survive but flourish in the volatile and highly competitive arena of nineteenth-century Urdu journalism *AA* was heavily dependent on the goodwill and support of its readers. To exercise its role as a representative and mediator of public opinion, *AA* had to listen closely to their voice. □

Master Ramchandra of Delhi College: Teacher, Journalist, and Cultural Intermediary

IN THE GENERATION BEFORE the Indian revolt of 1857, the city of Delhi had revived from the devastation caused by repeated invasions in the eighteenth century and its cultural and literary life was particularly vibrant. Indeed, the characterization of this age as a "twilight"¹ is unwarranted. It was an age that witnessed the flowering of Urdu poetry with the careers of Ghālib, Zauq, and Zafar, the emergence of the Urdu political press, and the ferment of religious controversy. It was also a time of intellectual interaction between the new British rulers and the Mughal service elites of North India (whether Hindu or Muslim), who still retained their administrative and cultural importance.

The institution of learning that both contained that intellectual interaction and abetted the flowering of literature and the press was Delhi College. I have discussed elsewhere the college and its contributions to knowledge.² This institution had two sections, a *madrasa* with an Oriental curriculum and a college with a Western curriculum, but its chief innovation was that all subjects, whether Oriental or Western, were taught in the vernacular, Urdu. This required collaboration between the European administrators and the Indian teachers and students at the college to translate and publish texts on scientific, social, and literary

¹By Percival Spear, in *Twilight of the Mughals* (Cambridge: University Press, 1949).

²In "Delhi College and Urdu," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 14 (1999), pp. 119–34; and "Qiran us-Sa'adati: The Dialogue Between Eastern and Western Learning at Delhi College," in *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760–1860*, ed. Jamal Malik (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 260–77.

subjects. The college established its own press that published not only textbooks, but also periodicals containing articles about contemporary developments in science and technology, international events, and serialized translations of popular works of literature and biography.

The chief figure in the development of the periodicals that issued from the Delhi College press in the 1840s and 1850s was Master Ramchandra, the mathematics professor at the *madrasa*. A North Indian Kayastha, Ramchandra rose from a relatively humble background to achieve renown both as a mathematician and as an Urdu stylist, known for his clear, unpretentious prose. He edited two of the journals published by the college: *Farā'id al-'n-Nāṭiqin*, a fortnightly, and *Muhibb-e Hind (Mh)*, a monthly scientific and literary journal. In the pages of these periodicals, Ramchandra made Western innovations in science and technology available to the literate public of North India, but also articulated an ideology of reform that involved openness to knowledge from wherever it issued. Ramchandra had a curiosity and love of learning that reflected the ideas that were being discussed at the college and among intellectuals in Delhi at the time. This paper will develop an intellectual portrait of Ramchandra, and discuss the contents of the Delhi College periodicals and Ramchandra's contribution to Urdu journalism and the transmission of knowledge.

Ramchandra was the son of Rai Sunderlal Mathur who, like many Kayasthas, served the government. Literate in Persian and adept at record keeping, Kayasthas served the Mughals and their successor states, including the East India Company as its territory expanded.¹ Sunderlal was from Delhi, but at the time Ramchandra was born, in 1821, he was posted to Panipat as a *na'ib sarkādar*. When Ramchandra was six he started school at a *maktub*, where he would have received basic training in Arabic and Persian grammar, reading, and the copying of texts. The family eventually moved back to Delhi, where Ramchandra entered the Delhi English school that became Delhi College. Sunderlal died in 1832, leaving his widow with six children. Ramchandra was married a year later to the daughter of a wealthy Kayastha family. Her dowry helped alleviate the family's straitened economic circumstances, but it turned out that his wife

¹For Kayastha subcastes and their careers in Mughal and post-Mughal bureaucracy, see Karen I. Leonard, *Social History of an Indian Caste: The Kayasthas of Hyderabad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), especially pp. 57–123.

was a deaf-mute. To cope with this adversity and to help his siblings get an education, Ramchandra quit school and worked as a clerk for three years before re-enrolling in Delhi College on scholarship. He was a devoted and successful student and completed his studies in 1844, at which point he was employed by Delhi College as a teacher of science and mathematics in the Oriental (or *madrasa*) section of the school. In this capacity, he taught algebra, trigonometry, and other branches of math through the medium of Urdu.⁴

As part of his teaching duties, Ramchandra also became involved in the work of the Delhi Vernacular Translation Society. The society had been founded in the early 1840s by the Principal of Delhi College, Felix Boutsos, in order to translate textbooks into Urdu, to facilitate the teaching mission of both the Western and Oriental sections of the college. Ramchandra and other teachers and students at the college participated in this effort, creating textbooks for their courses in the process. The society not only translated textbooks in medicine, math, science, law, economics, and history from English into Urdu, but also translated works of literature—significantly, not all of them from Western languages. For example, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Persian classics such as *Alf Laila wa Laila* (Thousand and One Nights), Sa'di's *Gulistan*, and the *Dharma Shastras*, were rendered into Urdu by and for the students in the Oriental section of the college.⁵ It is worthwhile to remark in passing that the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy in curricular matters, then raging among educators in India in the aftermath of Macaulay's famous "Minute on Education" of 1835, seemed to be much less important in the Mughal capital city than it did in the chambers of government in Calcutta.

Ramchandra translated several mathematics textbooks into Urdu and produced two original works in English. One of these, *A Treatise on*

⁴This biographical sketch of Ramchandra is based on 'Abdu 'l-Haq, *Maḥmūd Dabīr Kāshī* (Karachi: Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdū, 1962), pp. 167–72, hereafter cited as MDK; Edwin Jacob, *A Memoir of Professor Yashdatt Ramchandra of Delhi* (Kanpur: Christian Church Mission Press, 1902); Ṣadrīq 'r-Raḥmān Qidrī, *Adabīyāt Rāmchandra* (Delhi: Department of Urdu, Delhi University, 1961); and K. Sajjan Lal, "Professor Ramchandra as an Urdu Journalist," *Islamic Culture* (IC) 23, 1–2 (Jan.–Apr. 1949): 22–36.

⁵MDK, pp. 148–53; *Report of the General Committee on Public Instruction* [GCP], *Bengal* for 1840/41–1841/42, Appendix XV by Boutsos, dated Delhi, 1 July 1842, India Office Library & Records [IOLR], V/24/948.

Problems of Maxima and Minima Solved by Algebra, first published in 1850, was reprinted in London in 1859, commended by a leading mathematician there, and given a prize by the Indian government. Two Indian scholars, Dhruv Raina and S. Irfan Habib, have recently commented that this treatise reveals Ramchandra's intellect to be more than simply a conduit of Western mathematical knowledge to his students. In this treatise, Ramchandra pursued a means of solving problems algebraically that might more easily have been solved using differential calculus. For this reason, some simply dismissed it. Augustus De Morgan, a professor of mathematics at London's University College, however, did not. De Morgan championed the work, wrote an introduction to the British edition, and pointed out that Ramchandra's solution showed the strength of the Indian mathematical tradition in algebra. In developing this solution, Ramchandra performed an important pedagogical purpose: to reveal to his students the importance of their own tradition as a supplement to the newer methodologies coming from the West. The Indian mathematical tradition going back to Bhaskara was thus, in some sense, revitalized. Raina and Habib—if I understand them correctly—see Ramchandra's work as developing an alternative mathematical discourse that resisted cultural colonialism. Whether one agrees with that or not, what is certain is that Ramchandra validated Indian intellectual contributions, and his own, in the course of his mathematical work.⁶

At Delhi College, the moving spirit behind the translation society, Bourros, fell prey to ill health in the mid-1840s and was succeeded as Principal by Dr. Aloys Sprenger. Sprenger (1813–93) was a native of the Tyrol who, after completing his medical education, joined the medical service of the British East India Company in order to pursue his real intellectual passion, Oriental literatures.⁷ A scholar of Arabic and Persian,

⁶Ramchandra, *A Treatise on Problems of Maxima and Minima Solved by Algebra* with a foreword by Augustus De Morgan (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1859); Dhruv Raina and S. Irfan Habib, "Cultural Foundations of a Nineteenth Century Mathematical Project," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 24/37 (Sept. 16, 1989): 3082–6; "Regarding the Recompense to be Granted to Ramchandra of the Delhi College for His Work on Algebra," *Home (Educ)* 11–13, 8 May 1857, National Archives of India (NAI).

⁷For Sprenger's distinguished career as a literary scholar, see Annemarie Schummel, *German Contributions to the Study of Pakistani Linguistics* (Hamburg, 1981), pp. 48–74.

Dr. Sprenger presided over the founding of the college press, the *Maḡha'u l-'Ulūm*, and founded the first college periodical, the weekly *Qirānū 'l-Sa'dain*, in 1845.⁹ *Qirānū 'l-Sa'dain* is an Arabic astronomical term denoting the conjunction of the two fortunate planets, Jupiter and Venus; it also referred metaphorically to the interaction of two cultures, Eastern and Western, in the intellectual life of the college. Pandit Dharm Narayan, Pandit Moti Lal, and Maulvi Karim Bakhsh, all associated with Delhi College and its press, served at various times as editor of *Qirānū 'l-Sa'dain*, which, as a weekly, contained current news as well as literary items. In 1849, for example, events of the Sikh war were reported and there was an obituary of Lord Auckland, the former Governor-General. The activities and durbats of the Mughal emperor, Bahādur Shāh Zafar, were chronicled and Zafar's poems also appeared occasionally. Notices of books published by the college press and reviews were printed, as were translations of articles of literary and scientific interest.¹⁰

Ramchandra occasionally contributed to *Qirānū 'l-Sa'dain*, but he also started the fortnightly *Faṣṭ'idu 'n-Nāpirts* (roughly translated: "For the Benefit of the Reader") with the idea of spreading new learning beyond the walls of Delhi College. The fortnightly contained some news items, but more literary and scientific articles, serialized translations, and even illustrations: line drawings, maps, and diagrams (many of them copied from the *London Weekly Times*). He noted an earthquake in Constantinople in 1851 and the beginnings of the construction of the railroad leading westward from Calcutta.¹¹ In an example of a somewhat longer article in *Faṣṭ'idu 'n-Nāpirts*, Ramchandra discussed the condition of Muslim learning in India ("Ḥāl 'Ulūm Ahl-e Islām kā Hindustān Mēh") and criticized not so much the nature of Islamic scholarship as the means of its transmission. He said that Islam and Muslim learning came to India via Iran and the Persian language. The official language of the court

⁹Unfortunately very few copies of this journal have survived, and those in very fragile condition. I have seen a few issues from 1849 and 1853 in the Sajun Lal collection of newspapers at Osmania University, Hyderabad.

¹⁰K. Sajun Lal, "A Few Newspapers of the Pre-Mutiny Period," *Indian Historical Records Commission [IHRC]* 19 (1942): 130–1. Sajun Lal summarizes the contents of issues from the collection of Dr. Muhiyū 'd-Dīn Qādirī Zār at the Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Urdū in Hyderabad. Cf. Nadir Ali Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Dillī, 1991), pp. 136–45.

¹¹Sajun Lal in *IHRC* 19 (1942): 129–30.

remained Persian, even when the rulers were Turkish speakers. The original Arabic sources of religious and scientific learning, and the Greek sources of the Arabic knowledge, were lost sight of in translation, and in digests of translations, in digests of digests, and in stylistic embroidery. As a result, Islamic learning stagnated. Ramchandra consequently commended the revival of the study of Arabic grammar as well as *ḥadīṭ* and *fiqh* in the India of his day as a necessary return to the original sources and greater research.¹¹

Ramchandra's purposes here are linguistic and pedagogical. Though aware of the revival of religious scholarship taking place in Delhi thanks to the line of Shāh Walīu'l-Lāh and Shāh 'Abdu'l-'Azīz, Ramchandra is also inspired by the type of scholarly activity occurring at Delhi College, with its emphasis on the need for accurate translation. In fact this article reveals much about Ramchandra's intellectual approach to cultural encounter. Linguistic scholarship is necessary and the translators need to know both the source language and the target language well. But in addition, there is the question of transmission of knowledge. For that, there are two further considerations in his view: first, the target language needs to be that commonly spoken by the intended audience (Persian, in this article, being neither the language of the rulers nor of their Indian subjects), and secondly, the knowledge needs to be conveyed in as direct and clear a fashion as possible—no flowery embroidery. Ramchandra here, while not talking about British policies, nevertheless indirectly endorses the disestablishment of Persian, and he slams the ornate style of the courtly Persian of his day. He also, by extension, champions the transmission of knowledge in an Indian language, Urdu in this case. So this article contains a summation of Ramchandra's pedagogical approach.

His prose style further exemplified that approach. In contrast to much nineteenth-century Urdu prose, Ramchandra's writing was deliberately conversational, colloquial, and straightforward. His style remains easily accessible to this day. Various scholars have praised his style and traced his influence in the prose of Ghālib's letters and in the greater simplicity of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's later reformist writings in *Tebātū Y-Akhbār*. Certainly, Ramchandra contributed to the development of a simplified, journalistic Urdu, but when placed beside Ghālib's epistolary

¹¹ *Faṣlida 'n-Nāṣir* 5, 9 (29 April 1850), in Sajjun Lal collection, Osmania University.

prose, Ramchandra's style appears more artless than seminal.¹² His championship of clear expository prose in Urdu was certainly influential among his many students at Delhi College and was transmitted via his tireless periodical publication. It seems fair to say of Ramchandra's prose that he wrote as he spoke and he did both in order to teach and to reach as wide an audience as possible, though the circulation of his journals was never large.¹³

Ramchandra followed *Faṣṭ'ida 'n-Nāṣirīn* with another periodical published from Delhi College, a monthly founded in September 1847. At first called *Khairkhvab-e Hind* (or "Well-Wisher of India"), the title of the journal was changed after two months to *Muḥibb-e Hind* ("One Who Loves India" or "Indian Patriot") to avoid confusion with another *Khairkhvab-e Hind* published from Mirzapur.¹⁴ The content of this journal was very similar to that of *Faṣṭ'ida 'n-Nāṣirīn*: articles by Ramchandra and others on scientific, historical, and literary topics; serialized works of general interest; and coverage of local cultural events, especially *mushā'irāt*. *Muḥibb-e Hind* also had occasional illustrations: sketches, portraits of biographical subjects, and maps.

In one of the earliest issues of his monthly, Ramchandra wrote an important article, "Tarbiyat-e Ahl-e Hind kā Bayān," that further developed his pedagogical ideas. In the Orientalist-Anglicist debate that had by then stirred up intellectual circles in Delhi, Ramchandra acknowledged the importance of English for scientific knowledge, but nevertheless firmly backed the vernacular as the most effective medium of education. He did so not only in the interests of bringing about a synthesis of Eastern and Western knowledge, but especially because it would render that knowledge accessible to more people. He noted that in India, only a tiny minority knew English, and even those did not know it all that well. He noted that English was, if anything, even harder than Persian. Thus the

¹² Khwāja Ahmad Farūqī, *Zang-e-Junagī* (Lucknow: Idāra-e Farūq-e Urdū, 1967), pp. 273-5; cf. Saiyyida Jalīl, *Muqar Ramchandra aur Urdu Naṣr ke Itiqā' aur unke Hiyā* (Hyderabad: Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, 1960), pp. 90-9.

¹³ According to M. 'Aṣṣiddiqī, *Sabā-e Shīnat-e-Maghribī ke Akhbār-e-Maghribī* (Alligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū (Hind), 1962), p. 112, the circulation of *Faṣṭ'ida 'n-Nāṣirīn* at its peak was 150, that of *Muḥibb-e Hind* was 52.

¹⁴ Sajjan Lal, "Ramchandra as an Urdu Journalist," *IC* 23, 1-2 (Jan.-Apr. 1949): 32.

spread of knowledge via English would only benefit the few, and would lead to the kinds of problems that he had earlier noted concerning the transmission of knowledge in Persian: misunderstandings, mistranslations, and so on. He answered the Anglicists' argument that there was no one Indian vernacular by arguing that Urdu was understood from Attock to Parna and from Hyderabad, Deccan, to the borders of Nepal. No other language in India was used and comprehended to that extent. Urdu was thus the closest thing to a national language (*qawmī zabān*) in India and it should become the medium of higher education, not English. All peoples of India would benefit from the propagation of knowledge in a generally acceptable vernacular, and in his view, the obvious candidate was Urdu.¹⁵

Tides of other articles that appeared in *Muhibb-e Hind* give evidence of Ramchandra's eclectic interests as well as the range of topics that interested his potential readers: from "Zikr-e Dīving Bel, jis se Dūbā-huā Ashāb Samandar se Nikāl Sakāh,"¹⁶ ("A Description of the Diving Bell, by Which Sunken Materials May Be Retrieved from the Sea") to "Hāl un Ghalagiyōn kī jo ke Fāziln-e Hunūd nē 'Ulūm-e Mukhtalifa Shāsrar mēh kī Halā"¹⁷ ("A Discussion of the Mistakes that Hindu Learned Men Have Made in Various Sciences in the Shastras"). He published scientific articles on astronomy, on the work of Sir Isaac Newton,¹⁸ and a discussion of the relationship of the human mind and body ("Hāl-e Jism aur 'Aql-e Insān kī").¹⁹ Cultural articles included items about ancient Greece: "On Demosthenes,"²⁰ China: "On Confucius,"²¹ and Iran: a biography of the Safavid Shah Abbas.²² Another very popular genre was the travel-cum-ethnographic narrative, such as Edward W. Lane's *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*,²³ Elphinstone's *Kingdom of Caubul*,²⁴ and—putting the shoe on the other foot—the serialization of an original publication from the college press, *Tārīkh-e Yāuqūf*, or the travels of Yusuf

¹⁵ *Khairkhvāb-e Hind*, 2 (October 1847), cited in Faruqi, *Zauq-o-Justajā*, pp. 277–81; reprint of Faruqi's introduction to Qidwā'i, *Mātar Rāmchandra*, pp. 38–42.

¹⁶ *Muhibb-e Hind*, 6 (Feb. 1848).

¹⁷ *MH*, 22 (May 1849).

¹⁸ *MH*, 9 (May 1848).

¹⁹ *MH*, 22 (May 1849).

²⁰ *MH*, 8 (April 1848).

²¹ *MH*, 9 (May 1848).

²² *Khairkhvāb-e Hind*, 1 (Sept. 1847).

²³ *MH*, 34 (June 1850).

²⁴ *MH*, 18 (Feb. 1849).

Khan Kamalposh to England.²⁵ Ramchandra also discussed new scientific knowledge in agriculture and horticulture,²⁶ and summarized works of history and popular science. One of the regular features in *Mubibb-e Hind*, otherwise devoted to the dissemination of new knowledge, was a monthly selection of Urdu poetry by the likes of Zafar, Mir Dard, and Shāh Naṣr. Though Ramchandra was critical of flowery, poetic prose style, he was not disinclined toward verse, perhaps with the thought of increasing the circulation of the journal. Whatever the reason, poetic offerings were an important element in both *Faṣṭ'idu 'n-Nāṣirīn* and *Mubibb-e Hind*, indicative of the importance of poetry and poetic assemblies in the literary life of Delhi at the time.²⁷

Ramchandra continued publishing both *Faṣṭ'idu 'n-Nāṣirīn* and *Mubibb-e Hind* concurrently, frequently with a duplication of contents, until 1851. At the end of that year, he closed *Mubibb-e Hind*, as its circulation had shrunk from a high of 56 to 32. Then, in July of 1852, he converted to Christianity. This caused an uproar at the college and led to the withdrawal of a number of students.²⁸ The circulation of *Faṣṭ'idu 'n-Nāṣirīn* plummeted and by the end of that year it too had ceased publication. It was an unfortunate end to the story of these two journals, especially given their eclectic contents and the lively intellect that animated them both. Ramchandra's purposes throughout had been essentially pedagogical: to inform the public about a wide variety of topics, both Oriental and Western, and to facilitate cultural dialogue. It is a pity that, by his conversion, Ramchandra went too far in the direction of the culture of his colonial masters.

C. A. Bayly, in his massive study on imperial information makes a comment concerning cultural encounter: "Our understanding of colonial discourse must reflect the pervasiveness of Indian agency, of the Indian intellectual challenge, and of Indian cultural vitality."²⁹ This observation

²⁵ *MH*, 28 (Dec. 1849); 30–32 (Feb.–Apr. 1850).

²⁶ *MH*, 23–27 (July–Nov. 1849).

²⁷ Qidvā'i, *Mas̄dar Rāṣulandā*, appendix., pp. 178–84; *MH* nos. 14–37, with some missing nos., (Sept. 1848–Aug./Sept. 1850), IOLR.

²⁸ According to MDK, 25 students withdrew or were withdrawn when the news broke of Ramchandra's conversion, p. 56.

²⁹ *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 314.

seems particularly applicable to Ramchandra, at least before his conversion. He acted to propagate learning as widely as possible, he wrote incessantly using the new medium of the periodical press, and he challenged both sides in the cultural dialogue to remain open to the vast amount of new knowledge in the world, whether it arose in the West or the East. Ramchandra was a mediator, a pedagogue, and a popularizer. As with many such figures, his contributions have been overlooked or underestimated. Partly that was because Delhi College, his institutional platform, collapsed during the revolt of 1857, and, though it was revived thereafter, it never recaptured its former prominence. Then, too, English won out in the matter of a national medium of higher education. Ramchandra's most important legacy was in the evolution of Urdu journalistic style. His clear, straightforward, conversational prose exemplifies that "Indian intellectual challenge and Indian cultural vitality" that Bayly commended. □

The *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* Between Persian Akhbarat and English Newspapers*

Introduction

THIS PAPER LOOKS AT the *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* (henceforward *DUA*), the first full-fledged newspaper in Urdu, which started publication in 1837, and tries to locate it at the confluence of the traditional Mughal institutions and the newly introduced British models. While the colonial administrators continued to use the traditional methods of gathering information on the different royal and princely courts through the daily reports of accredited news-writers until almost 1857, they were nevertheless convinced that the vernacular newspapers, which started to appear from the second decade of the nineteenth century, owed themselves entirely to the British initiative, model and patronage:

A native newspaper in the present state of Indian society is a luxury, for which there is no real demand beyond the limits of Calcutta. It is to be feared that the poverty of our native subjects beyond the limits of the presidency operates generally speaking as forcibly as their want of curiosity to indispose them, from affording encouragement to native newspapers.¹

*This paper is the revised and enlarged form of a talk given at the International Conference on Modern South Asian Studies at Heidelberg University, September 2002.

¹Report on the state of the Indian Press by Andrew Sterling, compiled at the beginning of Lord Bentinck's rule; quoted in B.M. Sankhdher, *Press, Politics and Public Opinion in India. Dynamics of Modernization and Social Transformation* (Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication, 1984), p. 149.

This position finds a distant echo in some strands of present-day historiography, which, too, tends to see the colonial state, the colonial institutions and, above all, the colonial construction of knowledge as the prime moving forces of nineteenth-century India.

Without at all denying the importance of the study of power-relations and the pervading influence of the colonial power on all walks of life, this paper tries to draw attention to the lines of continuity bridging the precolonial and the colonial world, thus opening a third space beyond hegemony and resistance. In this space of "mutual encounters"² the boundaries between cultural systems become, if not fluid, at least permeable in both directions. Traditions were not so much displaced as renegotiated and adapted to new circumstances—both by the colonizer and the colonized.³

How then was the collection and processing of information transformed in the first half of the nineteenth century? Who were the patrons, who the professionals of this process and how did they interact within the framework of the newly-established colonial state? When and under what circumstances did the news-writers move from being a part of the administrative establishment of a ruler to the public sphere? What was the imagined community for which the newspapers and journalists then claimed to speak? What, in turn, was their role in bringing forth this community and evolving a public opinion? What was their new relation to the government, what place within the political process were they aiming at?

To attempt to answer these questions with reference to Delhi, this paper will first look at three collections of handwritten Persian *abkhārāt*.⁴ The second reference point will be two printed Persian newspapers, pub-

²As elaborated in Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760–1860* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).

³See: C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴These are the newsletters that were sent to the Maratha Court in 1810 and 1812 (OIOC, London, L.O.ISL 2945 and L.O.ISL 2947) and those that were prepared for Archibald Seton, the Resident at Delhi, in 1810 (BL, London, Add. 24038). I am very grateful to my Persian *ustād*, Dr. Yunus Jaffry, Delhi, for his invaluable help and untiring enthusiasm in the translation of these texts. An edition and translation of a representative collection of early nineteenth-century Delhi *abkhārāt* is planned for the near future.

lished from Calcutta but containing extended information on Delhi, the *Āṭma-e Sikanḍar* and the *Sulṭāna Ṭ-Akhbār*.⁵ We shall then move on to the *Delhi Gazette*,⁶ which was published from Delhi since 1833 and hence would provide the most obvious model for its Urdu contemporary. The main corpus of source material is of course formed by the different issues of the *DUA*, both published and unpublished.⁷

Handwritten Persian Newsletters

Since the time of the Emperor Akbar, a system of manuscript newsletters (*akhbārāt* from *khbār*, news) had evolved, which permitted the exchange of information between the imperial and the regional courts through news-writers. For this purpose, letters from the imperial envoys at the nobles' courts on the one hand, and the record of the emperor's daily proceedings on the other hand were compiled into a daily account which was then publicly read out during the *darbar*. The envoys of the nobles in turn took notes of this information and sent it back to their patrons. In contrast to the gathering of information by spies—which went on side by side with it—these news-writers were the central institution of a system guaranteeing an open flow of information between the emperor and the nobles, and at times also among the peripheral courts.⁸ Even though their office was defined with reference to the ruler, whom they were supposed to supply with the information he needed for taking the right decisions, the news-writers also contributed to the creation of a community of individuals linked together by reference to a common knowledge of events

⁵*Āṭma-e Sikanḍar*, 1833, 1835–37, 1840; *Sulṭāna Ṭ-Akhbār*, 1835–37, 1839–40, both National Archive of India (NAI), Delhi.

⁶*Delhi Gazette* (DG), Microfilm copies for 1835–56, OIOC, London.

⁷The 1840 issues have been published: Khwāja Ahmad Faruqi, ed., *Delhi Urdu Akhbār* (Delhi: Urdu Department, Delhi University, 1972); issues for 1841: NAI; issues for 1851–53 (not complete): Sajan Lal Collection, Osmania University, Hyderabad and *Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Urdū*, Hyderabad.

⁸Barly, pp. 10–56; Abdus Salam Khurshid, *Newsletters in the Orient: With Special Reference to the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), pp. 82–3; S.C. Sanial, "The History of the Press in India—Manuscript Newspapers," in *The Calcutta Review* (1981), pp. 1–47.

and which, perhaps, in spite of its obvious limitations in numbers and accessibility, can be seen as the nucleus of a public sphere.

The number of *akhbārāt* of the early nineteenth century which have survived in archives does not nearly match the great collections of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁹ nevertheless, there are references which permit the conclusion that the system not only survived but even thrived at least until the 1840s, and was equally used by the Indian and the British rulers—so much so that it is at times difficult to tell for whom a particular newsletter was written. The use of the Islamic or the Christian calendar provides only a rough indication as the dual dating systems appear to have been common both for the British and for the Indians.

The collection of newsletters for the Maratha Court for 1810 and 1812 consists of continuous daily reports regrouping the news from a variety of Indian courts. Information from Delhi was entered under two different headings: the traditional "*akhbār-e darbār-e mu'allā*" (News of the Exalted Court) contained an account of the daily proceedings of the emperor. These ranged from information on his health to reports on the internal administration of the palace affairs and the persons with whom the emperor had met and conversed. On the more political side, reports were being submitted as to the ceremonial interactions at the court, the bestowing of robes of honor and the payment of *satr*, which indicated the influence of individuals and factions in the emperor's entourage, and the correspondence with the British and Indians, giving the gist of the letters if it could be ascertained.

Next to this, but in the same format, came the information concerning the Resident, who was always referred to both by his British and his Mughal title "*akhbār-e dīwān-e Nāzim* *ʿā-Daula Seron Shāhib Bahadur*" for Archibald Seron, and "*akhbār-e darbār-e Munasip* *ʿā-Daula Mirza Metcalfe Shāhib Bahadur*" for Charles Metcalfe. Though the emphasis on his health, toilet, meals and sleep was slightly less than for the emperor, the reports were by no means informed by a division between the private and the official capacity of a public servant, but rather attempted to

⁹ Cf. Michael Fisher, "The Office of Akhbar Nawis: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," in *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 45–82, p. 49; Akhtar Husain Nizami, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts and Records in the Shri Raghobar Library, Sitapur* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research, Idara-e Adabiyat-e Delhi), 1993. I am grateful to Michael Fisher for drawing my attention to this collection.

bridge any cultural differences by including the British in the imperial framework—an attempt which was in accordance with official colonial policy until the 1890s.¹⁰

At the Mughal court, too, these traditions of newswriting seem to have continued. In his *Babādur Shāh II and the War of 1857 in Delhi With Its Unforgettable Scenes*, Mahdi Husain refers to one *Akbbār-e Darbār-e Abu'l-Muqaffar Sirāj-i 'd-Din Muḥammad Babādur Shāh Badshāh-e Delhi* for the period October 1837–December 1838.¹¹ This was probably the same format of Persian court diary which, after 1841, was published, printed and distributed under the title of *Sirāj-i Akbbār*.¹²

While the Marāṭhī newsletters most probably and the *Akbbār-e Darbār* certainly related to the indigenous system of collecting and processing information, the *akbbārāt* which were written for Archibald Seton, the British Resident at Delhi, in 1810 show the use of these traditional institutions by the colonial power. Delhi was at the same time the seat of the Mughal emperor and the outpost for the northwestern expansion of the British Empire in India and therefore the center for intelligence gathering from Kabul and the Panjab, employing an extensive network of news-writers until the 1820s.¹³ The first 56 folios of the collection, relating to Delhi, reported in two daily sections the events at the “Exalted Darbar” (*akbbār-e darbār-e mu‘allā*) and the “Residence of His Lordship of exalted virtues, Nazīm ud Daula, Mr. Seton Bahādur” (*akbbār-e dīwān-e jāhīb-e utlā manāqib Nāzimu 'd-Daula Miqar Seton Shāhib Bahādur*). Like the Marāṭhī newsletters, but very much more extensively, they reported every movement of the emperor: his health, when he rose from sleep and took rest, when he had his meals and with whom, when he moved to grace the Divān-e Khās with the luster of his presence, which petitions he

¹⁰Cf. Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals: Studies in Late Mughal Delhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 32–60.

¹¹(Delhi: M.N. Publishers & Distributors, 1987), p. 93. Mahdi Husain gives the Nazir Library at Delhi as the location of the manuscript. Unfortunately, it was not transferred to the Hamdard Library at Delhi along with the rest of the Nazir Library. Different hints indicate that it might now be in Karachi, but so far it has not been possible for me to trace the manuscript. Any information leading to its possible discovery would be gratefully appreciated.

¹²See Muḥammad ‘Atiq Siddiqī, *Ḥindustānī Akbbār-Nāstir* (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū, 1937), p. 237.

¹³Establishment attached to the Delhi Residency, Foreign Political Correspondence (FPC), 21.6.1822/30–31,

received from the members of his household and family, and what decisions he took—ranging from granting permission to his sons to visit the shrine at Nizamu 'd-Din¹⁴ to the distribution of the stipend among the members of the royal family, which was always an issue of contention with the British.¹⁵ This information on the royal court was either sent directly to Calcutta in Persian, or, at a later stage, formed the basis for the "Palace Intelligence" in English, a part of the regular reports of the Resident until the 1850s.¹⁶

The second part of the daily report described the activity of the Resident, mentioning his recreations, but centered mainly on his official functions, his interaction with the imperial court, his correspondence with the princely states under his jurisdiction and the Jagirdars of the Delhi Territory, and adding the results of the more important court cases. The function of these reports is less obvious as even at this early stage the proceedings and letters could more easily and completely be traced in the office archives of Delhi, Calcutta or London. One possible hypothesis is that they were read out in public during the Residency *darbar* and served on the one hand to provide information to the news-writers and *sakibs* of the nobles and Jagirdars of the region—a kind of early colonial daily press conference—and on the other hand to emphasize the exalted place, next only to the emperor himself, which the Resident occupied in the imperial framework.

It seems as if since the beginning of the century the newsletters tended to become accessible beyond the range of those persons who had originally commissioned them, possibly a device of the *akbār-nawīs* to cope with the dwindling resources available for patronage. When, for instance, in 1807 Seron tried to trace the causes and events of a riot occasioned by a new religious procession through Delhi, he relied not only on his own first hand information of what had transpired in the palace, but compared them to "three different newspapers,"¹⁷ which might have been

¹⁴*Akbārāt*, BL Add. 24038 folio 1.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, folio 11.

¹⁶See, for instance, FPC 30.1.1852/45 and FPC 16.5.1855/102–108. While the government in Calcutta regularly comments upon the palace intelligence, the original texts are almost never included, thus permitting no comparison between the reporting of the Persian *akbār-nawīs* and the processing of the information by the British Resident.

¹⁷FPC 4.6.1807/17, Report of the Resident, 13.5.1807.

either commissioned by the rulers of the adjacent princely states or already produced for an anonymous public.

Far from dwindling in their importance, the number of these handwritten gazettes seemed rather to increase in the course of the next decades. Macaulay, in a report written in 1836, mentions:

The gazettes (*akhbars*) which are commonly read by the Natives are in manuscript. To prepare these gazettes, it is the business of a numerous class of people, who are constantly prowling for intelligence in the neighbourhood of every *cutcherry* and every *darbar*. Twenty or thirty news writers are constantly in attendance at the Palace of Delhi and at the Residency. Each of these news-writers has among the richer natives, several customers whom he daily supplies with all the scandal of the Court and the City. The number of manuscript gazettes daily dispatched from the single dawk of Delhi cannot of course be precisely known, but it is calculated by persons having good opportunities of information at hundred and twenty. Under these circumstances it is perfectly clear that the influence of the manuscript gazettes on the native population must be very much more extensive than that of the printed papers (in the native languages whose circulation in India by dawk does not now exceed three hundred).¹⁷

These newspapers were not only handed round, but at times even seem to have been read out to a more general public by enterprising journalists themselves.¹⁸

Even before the advent of print culture and outside of its influence, and, as far as we can gauge at present, without noticeable change in the format of the newswriting, the function of the *akbbārāt* and the public they were catering for, were already in the process of being transformed.

Printed Newspapers in Persian

The first English newspapers began to appear in Bengal in the last decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ From the beginning, journalists and editors

¹⁷As quoted in Khurshid, p. 86.

¹⁸Santal, p. 10.

¹⁹Cf. Margarita Barna, *The Indian Press: A History of the Growth of Public Opinion in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), pp. 1-72; Nadir Ali

saw themselves as the central agents in the creation of a public opinion, drawing from the enlightenment philosophy that truth can only be arrived at through open deliberation. As they held this to encompass the right to discuss and, if need be, to criticize the actions of government, it soon led to an acrimonious fight for the freedom of the press.

What is interesting is that the dividing lines in this fight against censorship, although it separated Tories and Whigs, went right through the Government and the British living in India, and regrouped British and Indian liberals and journalists in common action. The public debate on the social functions of newspapers promoted not only a new self-awareness among the news-writers, but also led to a mutual reinterpretation of both the British and the Mughal traditions. Thus Raja Ram Mohan Roy, one of the leaders of the agitation, could claim in an appeal to the King in Council against the press regulations:

Notwithstanding the despotic power of the Mogul Princes ... the wise and virtuous among them always employed two intelligencers at the residence of their Nawabs ... *akhbar-naums*, or news-writers who published an account of whatever happened and a *Khasfa-naum*, or a confidential correspondent, who sent a private and particular account of every occurrence worthy of notice. ... (This) shews that even the Mogul Princes, although their form of Government admitted of nothing better, were convinced, that in a country so rich and so replete with temptations, a restraint of some kind was absolutely necessary to prevent the abuses that are so liable to flow from the possession of power.²¹

These discussions and agitations brought about a wave of new journalistic ventures, not only in English, but for the first time also in Bengali (1818) and Gujarati (1822), followed shortly afterwards by the first printed Persian newspapers (1822).²² The *Āṁna-e Sikandar*, published in Calcutta since 1833 by Ghālib's friend Sirāju 'd-Dīn,²³ contained a wealth of detailed information on the royal court and the Residency at Delhi. What

Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idāra-e Adabiyāt-e Dehli, 1991), chapter 1, pp. 1-24.

²¹As quoted in Barns, pp. 124-5.

²²For a list of the newly-founded newspapers from 1818 to 1833, see Sankhdher, pp. 146-9.

²³Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Ghālib, Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 60-2.

is astonishing in that respect is less the fact that the newspaper was able to collect this information, drawing mostly on handwritten gazettes, supplemented by occasional letters from correspondents and friends, but the interest these events still seemed to arouse among readers all over India and the amount of background knowledge the articles obviously could take for granted.

In the style of the traditional *akbārāt*, the column on the royal court gave detailed accounts not only of the state of health of the king and his comings and goings, but also of the correspondence he exchanged with the British, the visitors he received, the *watsāwā* paid to him, the robes of honor granted, and of the power struggles of the courtiers and princes. While this type of information provided valuable clues at a former time, when shifts of influence in the entourage of the king had a political significance, it is surprising that the change from one royal physician to another was still considered "news" having more than local significance in the 1830s.

To an even greater extent than the manuscript *akbārāt*, the *Āṁa-e Sikkandar* carefully observed all the traditional etiquettes when referring to the emperor or members of his household, introducing every article with a different verse-line praising the exalted glory of the monarch:

The angel is his guardian and the sky is his
threshold

The King is the shadow of God, the creator
of the two worlds²⁴

The King is the protector of the path of
Islam

He is the vice-regent of the Truth and the
shadow of God's kindness²⁵

Already by these introductory lines, the newspaper placed the monarch firmly within the parameters of Muslim and Persian history and cosmology: as if there was no British Resident, Delhi was still the seat of the Khilāfat, the emperor the shadow of God, the protector of the universe and of the Islamic religion. He was the *qibla* of the people of the

²⁴ *Āṁa-e Sikkandar*, 19. 1. 1835.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16. 2. 1835.

world, the *ka'ba* of his time.²⁶ The sky was his threshold; he equaled the sun and the moon in beauty and luster. He was of the glory of Saturn and the dignity of the Pleiades.²⁷ On a more mundane level, he was the ruler not only of Delhi or even of India, but of the seven continents, the Lord of the universe.²⁸ He equaled and even surpassed the rulers of old, bring of the grandeur of Solomon, the dignity of Alexander, the generosity of Faridun and the richness of Jamshed; therefore Darius was his gate-keeper.²⁹ Perhaps these ostentatious references to tradition can also be read as a fine criticism of the colonial government, a denial of its legitimacy by ignoring it and by pretending that its arrival was a matter of no consequence.

Nevertheless, as a newspaper even the *Āīna-e Sikandar* could not afford to dwell only on the timeless and unchanging glory of the empire. In an important innovation as compared to the traditional *akbārāt*, the editor directed his interest not only to the courts of the monarch, the nobles and the Resident, but sometimes, if still rarely, included a column on "*khbar-e dāru 'Ibbilāfar-e Shahjahanābad*" (News from Shahjahanabad), in which *fait divers*, called mainly from the court proceedings, are reported.³⁰

Much more explicit in its critique of the colonial power, though less given to colorful hyperbole, was the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akbār*. This weekly, too, was published from Calcutta since the early 1830s. Its editor was one Rajab 'Alī, who might possibly be identical with the poet from Lucknow, Rajab 'Alī Sarūr.³¹ Unlike the newspapers we have looked at so far, the *Sulṭānu 'l-Akbār* is no longer concentrating on rulers whose every act is seen as endowed with an intrinsic importance, but on events, on "news" in the modern sense of the term, which it reports and—this is important—comments on.

This can be shown in an exemplary fashion in the representation of the events following the assassination of the British Agent, William Fraser, in 1835, which led to the public execution of Shamas 'd-Dīn, the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.5.1835.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.1.1836 and 6.3.1836.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.1.1835 and 19.1.1835.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.4.1835.

³¹ Saddiq, p. 244; Imdād Šāhī, *Tārīkh-e Šāhājīn-e Urdu*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Jadid Printing Press, 1953–74), vol. 1, p. 84.

Navab of Loharu. This murder case has for a long time been taken as originating in a property dispute between the Navab and his brothers, in which Fraser (as well as Ghillib) took the side of the younger branch, but which might well prove to be more complicated than that. Public opinion in Delhi and beyond, right from the beginning, vehemently took the part of the accused nobleman, turning the trial into a major legitimization crisis for the colonial government.

While the process was pending, the *Sulṭān Ṭ-Aḥḥād* voiced the popular feelings as to the innocence of the Navab, discrediting the witnesses for the prosecution,²² and denying the fairness of the trial, as the representative of Shamsu 'd-Dīn was constantly hampered in his defense and the witnesses for the defense threatened with imprisonment.²³ The newspaper skillfully played with public rumors, for instance in the report of the ordeal which the Navab underwent at the instigation of the special magistrate and in which he was blindfolded but nevertheless chose the cup of milk, proving his innocence, from among the cups of blood and poison. The reporter himself ended by denying the probability of this report, which would be out of tune, as he put it, with "the wisdom and knowledge" of the English, who would never permit "such childish play"; but this denial came only after the message of Shamsu 'd-Dīn's innocence had gone home.²⁴ Once the Navab and his accomplice were hanged, the articles took on strong religious overtones, reporting on prayer meetings at the Jama Masjid for the "*gul-e shahīd*" (flower of the martyrs) and on the gathering of pious Muslims at their graves, illuminating them and spending the nights in singing and dancing.²⁵

Thus the new print media came to provide a link between the traditional local public opinion, expressing itself in festivals, processions and public ritual,²⁶ and the new public, which was no longer based on direct interaction but on imagined communities.²⁷ In its critique of British rule,

²² *Sulṭān Ṭ-Aḥḥād*, 2.8.1835, 16.8.1835 and *passim*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.8.1835.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.8.1835.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.9.1835 and *passim*.

²⁶ See Sandria Freitag, *Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²⁷ In the sense of Benedict Anderson as expounded in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

the newspaper was able to draw on a consensus about the tasks and duties of government, whose fulfillment it was not hesitating to demand.

The Delhi Gazette

Though these newspapers reported intensely on Delhi and were avidly read by the local learned people, all of them (including the *Jam-e Jahān-Namā* and the *Mab-e Alam-Afrāz*) were based in Calcutta. The first newspaper of Delhi, the English *Delhi Gazette*, was founded in 1833. It is often claimed that the British model was central for the development of the vernacular press—if this were true, it is probably here that we would find the blueprint for the *DUA*.

Unfortunately, no issues seem to have survived from the first four years of the paper. From the *Mirror of the Indian Press* we know that it had been founded by one H. Hope who was also associated with the *Merrut Observer*.³⁸ This editor left the *Delhi Gazette* in December 1836 on obtaining Government employ and for some months the newspaper was kept alive by "some kind friends, who have at leisure moments aided Mr. Gregory," the printer and publisher.³⁹ The newspaper explained in a short notice to its correspondents that they should "never lose sight of the one great object for which our paper was established, the development of the immense natural resources of these provinces and the improvement of the moral and social conditions of the inhabitants" and "devote the time, which they are disposed to dedicate to us, to subjects which are likely to afford either amusement or information to our readers."⁴⁰

Already at this point in time the reporting was primarily addressed to the British community, featuring columns on births, deaths and marriages, giving the notification of arrivals and departures at the different North Indian stations, including the moving of army regiments, announcing sporting events and balls and carrying a large number of advertisements—from newly-founded boarding schools in the hills to English books, wines, and even houses for rent—besides articles catering exclusively to the interests of the colonial army and civil population such as debates on the pension funds or new promotion rules.

³⁸ Sankhdher, p. 175.

³⁹ *DG*, 1.8.1837.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.2.1837.

However, in the earlier time this did not exclude pieces focusing on local events. Letters by members of the royal family, drawing the attention of the public to their plight, were given respectful attention;⁴¹ in the debates on the increase of the royal stipend, the editor even took up the position of Bahādur Shāh, as "we can, as public journalists, only express our deep regret at the disappointment which must now be universally felt."⁴² Still imbued with the ethos of the fight for the freedom of the press, the newspaper claimed that "our duty as well as inclination, induce us to comment on every improper act of authority,"⁴³ as "the press, to be useful, ought always to be against the Government, that is to say it ought to be so dependent on the people as to be always prepared to oppose any innovations or acts of oppression."⁴⁴ The press thus situated itself firmly within the public sphere as opposed to the state; neither the public nor the state being at this stage defined or identified by criteria of race. Even if the editor shared racial qualities with the rulers, he did not identify with the state and perceived it as an integral part of the journalist's task to guard the people's freedom and expose abuses of power.

This position underwent a profound change from the late 1830s onward. The moving force, as far as the *Delhi Gazette* is concerned, appears to have been the intense competition for the restricted market available for English language newspapers in North India, which led first to the takeover of the lithographic press of the *Merrut Observer*,⁴⁵ then to the merger with the *North West Englishman*.⁴⁶ The new editor succeeded, within a relatively short span of time, in raising the subscriptions for the newspaper from 350 to 900 and to more than 1100 in 1843.⁴⁷ This takeoff certainly profited from the increasing demand for up-to-date news during the first Afghan War. However as the newspaper succeeded in holding and even in further raising this level after the cessation of the hostilities, the change in the editorial policy seems to have been even more significant. It decidedly turned the newspaper into a mouthpiece of and forum for the Anglo-Indian community in North India, catering to their specific

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.2.1837.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12.4.1837.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.6.1837.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.10.1837.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.2.1839.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.5.1842; 3.5.1843.

interests and giving large amounts of space to correspondence, debate and articles by readers. Added to this were new columns of news "from home," reports on the sessions of the House of Lords and the House of Commons and events at the Court of the British Monarch, as well as literary and social news—together with the official gazette and the different circulars, these columns accounted for more than two thirds of the space of the newspaper.

The reporting of local events involving the native community of Delhi, on the other hand, was proportionally reduced. Where it still took place, the former respectful or at least polite attitude had given way to condescension and open ridicule: when the editor learned of the existence of the *Siraj-i-Akhbar*, the official court gazette mentioned above, he arranged "to exchange copies with the Editor and dare say we shall find some very interesting or, at least, if not instructive, amusing details in it."⁴⁸ However, he seemed to have been less amused than he expected and some months later commented with acerbity, "We cannot help thinking that it is almost time that some of the tom fooleries of the would be royalty of the Timour dynasty were attempted to be clipped and that the potent Sovereign in this city should be taught that the day has gone by for the observance of privileges he claims, at least as regards Europeans."⁴⁹

Very few topics emerged as of common interest to both the British and their "black brethren," as they had now become.⁵⁰ the state of the roads, the law and order situation, and linked to it the allegation of police corruption, enlivened by the occasional *fait divers*, the preparation for sati by a "Cashmirienne,"⁵¹ or of a fire that nearly destroyed the Mori Masjid.⁵² An exception has to be made, however, for the recurrent reporting on the Delhi College and on the proceedings of the Delhi Relief Society, which also formed regular columns in the *DUA*.

On the whole, however, it seems improbable that the editors of the *DUA* would have been willing to take the *Delhi Gazette* as their journalistic role model, and, even if they had been willing to do so, that they would have found enough articles of interest to translate or summarize for their own readership. It is by way of a closer look at the history and text

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.8.1840.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.7.1842.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.2.1843.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.7.1840.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19.3.1842.

of that newspaper that we shall now attempt to situate it with reference to its Persian and English predecessors and contemporaries.

The *Delhi Urdu Akhbār*—Patrons, Publishers and Editors

The *Delhi Akhbār*, renamed *Delhi Urdu Akhbār* in 1840, is traditionally deemed to have been founded by Maulavi Muḥammad Bāqir in 1836 or 1837 and to have been printed on a lithographic press, which the said Maulavi bought from Dr. Sprenger, the principal of the Delhi College.⁵³ This knowledge is based on a report given by Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, the son of Maulavi Muḥammad Bāqir. Out of respect for the word of such an eminent scholar, generations of researchers have wondered how Maulavi Muḥammad Bāqir could buy the press in 1836, when it was only in 1842 that Dr. Sprenger came to Delhi and introduced the press to the Delhi College, and why his name is never mentioned in connection with the newspaper until the early 1850s.⁵⁴ The easiest explanation might perhaps be that Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād's commitment to factual accuracy was not only matched but even surpassed by his filial piety, and that he tended to exaggerate his father's role in this journalistic venture.

The earliest reference we have to the *DUA* dates from 1837.⁵⁵ The oldest surviving copy we know of at present is the 1840 volume located in the National Archive at Delhi, which was published by Khwāja Aḥmad Fārūqī. The information as to the persons associated with the newspaper at the time is confusing. Complying with the requirements of the Press Law, from January to July it was mentioned that the *DUA* was published *ke ibtīmām* (i.e., under the management of) Sayyid Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn, who was also the owner. The same Sayyid Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn changed his title to "Superintendent" (in English) in July, in which capacity, however, letters were addressed to him already in January.⁵⁶ In August some internal crisis seems to have prevented the naming of a person in charge, the proprietors

⁵³ Saddiqī, pp. 266–8; Šābrī, *Urdu ke Akhbār-Nawā* (Delhi: Šābrī Academy, 1973), p. 147; Khān, pp. 66–8.

⁵⁴ Šābrī, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, pp. 121–6.

⁵⁵ Ishāq Ḥusain Qureshi, "A Year in Pre-Mutiny Delhi (1837 A.C.)," in *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943), pp. 282–97. The copy, which formed the basis for this article, seems to have been lost during Partition.

⁵⁶ *DUA*, 26.1.1840, p. 7.

of the *DUA* Press taking collective responsibility. Later in August, Sayyid Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn reappeared, to be joined for a short span by Mirzā Imdād 'Alī Bēg, only to be replaced by Mōrī Lāl, both as "publisher" (in English) and as *muḥammim*. In 1852, the situation was hardly less bewildering. The formula now had become *ba ibtimām, printar-o-publisher DUA*. The persons referred to, however, changed frequently, Sayyid Hasan, Muḥammad Husain, and Imdād Hussain all in turn being named as responsible. At this stage Muḥammad Bāqir was never mentioned, except for the fact, that the printing press was located at a house belonging to him; we know however that he was the responsible editor in 1857.³⁷

What do these details tell us about the working of the newspaper? All of the persons just mentioned—with the exception of Mōrī Lāl—were Shī'a ulama. For most of them, their link to the Delhi College was not direct, but mediated through Navāb Hāmid 'Alī Khān, the son-in-law of Navāb 'Itimādū 'd-Daula, once prime minister of the Awadh State, whose generous endowment had provided the initial impetus for the founding of the Delhi College.³⁸ Navāb Hāmid 'Alī Khān was the most influential patron of the Shī'a community in Delhi from the middle of the 1830s to 1857, holding not only a pivotal position in the local committee for education, which controlled the Delhi College, but also serving as Prime Minister for Bahādur Shāh at several instances in the early 1840s. He was the founder of the Shī'a Maṣjid near Kashmiri Gate, which provided the focal point for the community, and the patron of many Shī'a scholars, amongst others those who were associated with the publishing of the *DUA*.

Muḥammad Bāqir's relation with this group of editors seems to have been a difficult one. This was due partly to his personal animosity to Maulavi Qāri Ja'far, who taught Arabic at the Delhi College, a quarrel which resulted in an acrimonious exchange of pamphlets and farwas and also finally in a case before the British court, partly to the different positions they took with regard to the appropriate celebration of the Muharram festival and specially the custom of the cursing of the first three Khalifas. Muḥammad Bāqir was the only one among the persons associated with the editing of the newspaper who had been both a student

³⁷ *DUA*, 31.3.1851.

³⁸ Margrit Pernau, "The Delhi College" (Introduction), in C.F. Andrews, *Zakariyah of Delhi*, eds. Mushirul Hasan, Margrit Pernau (Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

and a teacher at the Delhi College, before he left it for a post as *sar-rishtradr* in the revenue department of the British Residency. It is in this capacity that he was first mentioned in the *DUA*.⁵⁹ He was dismissed after sixteen years, possibly on the charge of corruption, after which he is often referred to in the newspaper in connection with his preaching activities.⁶⁰ Shortly afterwards his name began to appear as an editor of the *DUA*. The years in the revenue department clearly seem to have left him with much wealth: he not only built an *imāmbāra* near the Shī'a Masjid, but also constructed a caravansary cum auction house at Kashmiri Gate—an interesting highlight on the fluidity of the boundaries between scholars, religious leaders, professionals and businessmen.⁶¹

Journalism—A New Professional Consciousness

If the large number of people associated with the editing and printing of a newspaper was not exceptional for the *DUA*, many more people could have been involved with the new print media than hitherto believed, even though it can be supposed that most of them were not full-time journalists, but drew on a whole range of occupations for their livelihood.

In a very interesting article, dated 7 August 1853, the editor, Imdād Husain, spelled out the ethos of the journalistic profession—a piece of writing so interesting that it is worth quoting in some detail:

It is evident, that the dignity (*marjāb*) of a manager (*mudtarim*) of a newspaper is in fact corresponding to the position of a preacher (*na'ib*). The main object of producing and publishing a newspaper ... is the teaching and preaching of subjects, which are useful for the human beings and the common welfare (*ri'āyat-e 'ām*). The intension is that the common people should imbibe virtues and shun vices. They should feel ashamed of their bad conduct when they read the newspaper and as a result fight to give it up. Therefore, the manager of the newspaper should first himself strive for laudable manners (*akhlaq-e ḥamīdā*) and agreeable qualities (*ṣaḡāt il-e paṣandāda*). If he wants to teach something to the common

⁵⁹ *DUA*, 12.8.1840, p. 183.

⁶⁰ *DUA*, 8.8.1852; 22.8.1852; 19.9.1852; 26.9.1852; 14.11.1852; 26.12.1852; article, ca. May 1853. (first page of the issue missing).

⁶¹ Šāhri, *Akhlaq-Nawā*, pp. 144–66.

people, he should practice it himself. As far as possible, therefore, he should acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences, and ponder over questions of morality. When he intends to take up the pen, he should become grave and serious ... and never indulge in satire and foolish prater. This should also be the attitude he should encourage in his correspondents (*karrispanlon*). ...

As far as possible, the manager of a newspaper should investigate whether the reports of the correspondence are true or false. Otherwise, the standard of the paper will be brought down and it will loose its reputation. The readers will then begin to cast doubts even on true news.⁶²

The article ended with praise for the British who introduced the art of printing to India and thus brought about the expansion of knowledge.

It certainly echoed the contemporary discussions in the English-medium newspapers on the responsibility of the journalists for the spreading of truth and the enhancement of morality. Nevertheless, it placed this enlightenment discourse into the framework of the conception of the duties of a religious teacher to reform first himself and then those around him and lead them on the path of virtue, simultaneously harnessing the journalists to the project of religious reform and claiming a position in the modern public sphere for the religious leaders. This intertwining of religion and public debate might have partly arisen from the fact that it seems that the ulama were the first to take to the new profession; at the same time it sheds further light on the profile of the pre-1857 ulama, whose scholarship and interests were by no means limited to religion in the restricted sense of the notion.⁶³

Interestingly, this religious reconfiguration of the role of the journalist by no means precluded the rise of a professional consciousness transcending the boundaries of the communities. The large and ever increasing number of printing presses, which came up since the 1840s, seriously cut down the profits of the shareholders and led to the bankruptcy of a number of ventures.⁶⁴ In spite of this competition, we find an

⁶²*DUA*, 7.8.1853.

⁶³For further observations on the changing role of the ulama, see Margrit Pernau, "Middle Class and Secularization: The Muslims of Delhi in the 19th Century," in *Middle Class Values in India and Western Europe*, eds. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2002), pp. 21–41.

⁶⁴See, for instance, *DUA*, 19.9.1852 for the closing of the *Mayha's* 'I-Ulami; for the proliferation of printing presses, see *ibid.*, 7.8.1853.

exhortation, dated 2 October 1853, to all the journalists that they should not rejoice in the troubles of their colleagues, as "it is necessary for us to think of all the persons of our profession (*ham-peśha*) as one unity (*sabhiś*), and consider their sorrows our own sorrow and imagine their comfort to be our own comfort."

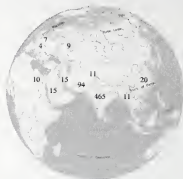
It may be hoped that once we find more detailed biographical information on the persons linked not only to the *DUA* but also to its contemporaries, it will be possible to see more clearly along which lines—profession, patronage, family, friendship, religion—these networks of solidarity were developed.⁶¹

The "Mental Map" of the *Dehli Urdu Akbbār*

The colonial British officers reporting on the development of the vernacular press in its beginnings have always claimed that it showed little originality. Most of the choice of what constituted "news" as well as the actual articles, they insisted, were derived directly from the Anglo-Indian press. If, however, we try to visualize the geographical distribution of the articles of the *DUA*, both with reference to India and even more strikingly with reference to the world, so as to constitute a sort of "mental map" of the editors and readers, a very different picture emerges.

Contrary to the large emphasis given to news from Europe, but specially from England, in the *Dehli Gazette*, scarcely any importance was accorded to them in the *Dehli Urdu Akbbār*. England figured in just 7 articles in 1840, closely followed by France with 4, and surpassed by Russia with 9 articles. Already Egypt was considered more notable with 10 articles, while the Arabian Peninsula featured in 15 articles. The large number of articles on Burma (11) and China (20) may be explained by the military events; the same holds true for Afghanistan (94), the Middle East (15) and Central Asia (11), which reflected the First Afghan War. Nevertheless, still in 1852/53, the 9 articles on Europe (England 6, France 2, Italy 1) were matched by more than double that number on Central Asia (19). On the whole, interest in the world outside of India tended to diminish further, from 31.3% of the articles in 1840 to a mere 16.4% in 1852/53.

⁶¹The role of the Kayasth community in the printing business in Delhi, both in Urdu and in English, would in this perspective constitute a fascinating topic of research.

Delhi Urdu Akbbār, 1840, distribution of articles (1)

(Copyright Microsoft Encarta Interactive World Atlas)

If we turn to the distribution of the 465 articles on the Indian sub-continent, the administrative centers Calcutta (23), Bombay (14), Madras (5) and Agra, the capital of the North Western Provinces (27) stood out. Otherwise, the south was almost completely ignored and the reporting followed the lines of the heartlands of the Mughal Empire, stretching from Lucknow (8), via Delhi (138), its surroundings (46), and Rajasthan (15) to the Panjab (Ludhiana 20, Lahore 27) and from there to Sindh (11) and Baluchistan (6) on the one hand and the Hindukush (17) on the other.

the "imagined community" fairly well. Socially, the price of 2 Rs. a month—at a time when even the grandsons of the emperor received monthly stipends of not more than 5 Rs.⁶⁷—excluded not only the lower classes, but a substantial part of the literati as well.

The *DUA* continued the traditional reporting on the events of the royal court. However, unlike in the Persian newspapers referred to above, the emphasis moved from the exaltation of the royal power—Bahādur Shāh lost his anchoring in the history and cosmology and became a mere "*bugārānā*"—to a survey of the events taking place inside the palace. While the emperor was still spared direct criticism, his counselors and ministers were not. In a way that showed an awareness of the influence of modern media not usually associated with the inhabitants of the Exalted Fort, the newspaper was at several instances turned into a mouthpiece for one or the other faction at the court. It castigated the corruption of the imperial administration, which was leading to delay in the disbursement of the monthly stipends.⁶⁸ But it also attempted to discredit individual princes, for instance gloating over the difficulties Mirzā Shāh Rukh encountered during his pilgrimage to the Qadam Sharif shrine, when he was waylaid and held up by the moneylenders demanding their due,⁶⁹ or extensively reproducing the royal exhortation to careful fund management at the address of the Crown Prince.⁷⁰

This "media consciousness" was also reflected in the attempts of the court to modernize its own information policy by having the traditional *akbār-nā* printed at the royal press,⁷¹ at times even in a bilingual edition.⁷² Bahādur Shāh regularly had the printed newspapers read out to him and took care to correct misrepresentations related to the court by means of the *Siyaḥ-i-Akbār*, which was primarily distributed within the palace, but copies of which were also sent to the most important British administrators.⁷³

The events relating to the colonial state, too, were regularly described in detail in the *DUA*—at the all-India as well as at the provincial and

⁶⁷FPC, 24.10.1836/13; FPC, 11.10.1850/139; FPC, 3.5.1857/16–18.

⁶⁸*DUA*, 10.5.1840 and 13.1840.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 10.5.1840.

⁷⁰Qureshī, p. 292.

⁷¹*DUA* (title page missing, probably May 1833).

⁷²DC, 26.4.1843.

⁷³Ṣaddiqī, *Akbār-Namā*, p. 259.

local level. This information ranged from short announcements regarding newly-posted officers, the departure of officers on leave and their return, to abridged and translated versions of government circulars, and notices of the interactions of the Agent (as the Resident was renamed after 1833) with the royal court or with the nobles and their representatives. As a whole, the *DUA* could probably be classified as a loyalist newspaper—whether this was due to the continued surveillance of the press law or to the fact that, apparently, a substantial portion of the editors and readers were either in British service or dependent on British patronage has to be left open. Nevertheless, the government was not spared harsh condemnation, once the immediate interests of the readers were touched upon. Among these criticisms was an attack on the government for its inaction during the famine of 1833, which, according to the editor of the *DUA*, was due less to the scarcity of grain than to the failure to control the prices.⁷⁴ The newspaper often voiced the grievances of the *mafidars* (*ma'fidars*), the holders of tax-free tenures, traditionally scholars and religious persons, who under the British were threatened with the resumption of their grants.⁷⁵ However, the excitement seemed to have subsided once it became clear that the owner of less than 10 *bigha* would not be touched by the measure, which in turn gives us a fairly precise idea of the economic background of the typical reader.⁷⁶ Another topic which drew comments from the editor as well as prompted letters from the readers was the introduction of an order requiring residential property owners to provide a bond for their lodgers,⁷⁷ with the aim of facilitating the search for potential criminals—once again providing not only an indication of the topics of public discourse, but also of the economic strata from which the readers were drawn. In the same group of articles the numerous references to the inefficacy and corruption of the police should also be included, which at the same time serves to challenge the British legitimization of government through the guaranteeing of law and order.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *DUA*, 1.1.1833.

⁷⁵ Qureshi, p. 292; *DUA*, 26.1.1840; *ibid.*, 2.2.1840.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.3.1840.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.2.1840; 13.1840; 8.3.1840; 22.3.1840 and *passim*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.1.1840; 2.1.1840; 9.2.1840; 15.2.1840; 1.3.1840; 26.7.1840; 25.10.1840 and *passim*.

This reporting on the imperial court and the colonial power may be seen as a continuation of the institutions of the *akbārāt*. However, by discussing the implications of the acts of those in power for the general public, and trying to influence those in power through the creation of a public opinion (as distinct from an information policy directed at an individual ruler), the traditions were subtly, but none the less profoundly, transformed.

The intermingling of tradition and change becomes even more obvious in those articles which focused on events in the public sphere. The *DUA* was known to be the mouthpiece of the Shī'a community, and the British complained that it was "a scurrilous print which abounded in personal and covert attacks on the native gentlemen of respectability who differed from the editor in their religious views."⁷⁷ However, with the exception of some articles on Sunnī-Shī'a riots during Muḥarram, which involved the dispute over the cursing of the first three Khalfas on which Muḥammad Bāqir and his rival Qāri Ja'far 'Alī took strong positions,⁷⁸ the editors attempted to cover the entire range of religious events—from the P^hūlōā ki Sair in Mehrauli,⁷⁹ to the 'Īd celebrations,⁸⁰ the Bāra Vafāt⁸¹ and the Rām Līlā festival.⁸² It is too early to say, what the impact of the reporting on these events, traditionally constitutive of the localized public sphere, had on the transformation of religious perceptions themselves. But even presuming that here changes took place only at a later date, the very fact of their descriptions being available almost simultaneously throughout North India transformed the setting in which they were taking place and began creating a new trans-local public audience for these religious functions.

None of these topics figured—except as an occasional curiosity—in the pages of the *Delhi Gazette*. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the debate on education dominated the English as well as the

⁷⁷Quoted without reference in J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism (Part II of the Report of the Press Commission)* (Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956), p. 63.

⁷⁸*DUA*, 1.3.1840; 22.3.1840; 1.2.1852; 18.7.1852; 7.11.1852; 14.11.1852; 12.12.1852.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 12.7.1840; 19.8.1840; 13.9.1840; 22.8.1852; 29.8.1852.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 16.2.1840; 29.11.1840; 18.1852.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 11.2.1852.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 11.10.1840.

vernacular public sphere, before political reforms took over as the central topic of discussion in the last decades prior to the turn of the century. Both the *Delhi Gazette* and the *DUA* contained regular articles on the Delhi College. In the 1840s, this institution had already been transformed from a *madrasa*, centering on religious scholarship and the classical languages, into a college, in which the British controlled the curricula and the textbooks. Though Urdu was the medium of instruction, the aim was the introduction of Western knowledge and the training of Indians for the middle and lower level jobs in the colonial administration, notably in the fields of education and the judicial system, but also in public works and surveys.⁵⁵

To a much larger extent than the other famous educational institutions in Delhi, the Delhi College in the 1840s and 1850s became the focal point for the debate on education and the possibility, necessity, but also the danger of cultural transformation. However, possibly due to the loyalty it felt it owed Nawāb Hāmid 'Alī Khān as a member of the local board of education, the *DUA* neither referred to tensions within the teaching staff nor even ventured more than a fleeting remark on the greatest crisis which shook the College, viz., the conversion of Master Ramchandra to Christianity.⁵⁶ Instead, we find long reports on the annual prize-giving ceremonies, mentioning the names of all the awardees, and the recognition of the College by local and visiting British functionaries.⁵⁷ A more discreet—but perhaps even more efficient—advertisement is found in the recurring mention of the jobs that former alumni of the College have been able to secure in the British administration.⁵⁸

All these findings point to the existence of a little studied class of people, who formed the core of the readership of the *DUA*, and—we may presume—also of the other Urdu newspapers published in the two decades before 1857. They were situated between the old nobility and the meritorial classes, not only well-educated, but increasingly making their education a means for their livelihood, working for the traditional powers, as administrators of the royal or noble households and as their attorneys and advocates, but also for the colonial administration. These professions

⁵⁵ Pernau, "Delhi College."

⁵⁶ *DUA*, 25.7.1852.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.2.1852, 6.2.1853.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.2.1840, 12.8.1840 and *passim*.

surely existed already before the advent of the British. What was new, however, was the extent to which the print media provided them with a platform to voice their interests, to interact with each other on a supra-local level and to develop a consciousness as a distinct social group. Like the European middle classes, they increasingly identified their interests with the public good (rifāʿ-i ʿam). From there, to constitute themselves as the "true representatives" of the nation was only a small step.

Conclusion

Discussions of civil society and the public space in India, which have brought about many excellent studies in recent years, tend to take their starting point from the late nineteenth century at the earliest, thus concentrating on a period when the colonial power was already at its pinnacle and dominated the public knowledge and the discourses to a large extent. Viewed from there, the public sphere and its institutions can indeed seem a foreign import. If, however, we move back in history and focus on the period of transition between the late Mughal Empire and the early colonial state, it is possible to capture encounters between cultural systems and discern how even institutions seemingly imported from the West bore the imprint of earlier traditions and how these traditions in turn came to impinge on the perception of the other and its transformation.

This paper has tried to show that the *DUA* stands in the continuum of the Persian *akhbārāt*, which had already been undergoing adjustments since the early 1830s when they began being printed for a larger readership. These changes were less perceptible in the reporting on events taking place at the court, be it the darbar of Bahādur Shāh or the public audiences of the Resident, which were constructed and perceived in analogy to the royal model. They became more distinguishable once the news-writers moved out of the scope of traditionally sanctioned topics and started to include events from the public sphere such as religious processions and festivals and literary gatherings. Reports on educational functions and charitable associations, finally, found their place both in the vernacular and also in the English press. Although there still existed differences of style, on these issues the streams almost merged.

Unlike the *akhbārāt*, which were written to provide a ruler or a ruling group with information (which of course did not preclude an information policy on the part of the news-writer), the *DUA* consciously aimed at forming public opinion and providing a forum for discussion for a group

which, while still well-defined in terms of education, social status and to some extent also income, tended to become increasingly anonymous. While the letters to the "superintendent *šāhib*" were a feature taken from the English newspapers, we don't know enough to judge whether the public and critical discussion of government measures owed only to the Western tradition of enlightenment. British references to the "circulation of inflammatory papers," which were recopied and distributed by the readers and which were held to contain "the most absurd reports and mischievous misrepresentations ... to agitate men's minds and to produce evil which might have been prevented or guarded against if the circulation had been effected by printed paper"¹⁰ tend to indicate that there might still be an entire genre of newspapers which has so far neither been analyzed nor even found in the archives.

Far from being displaced by the advent of British journalism and information technology, or even by "mixed forms" like the *DUA*, the *akbārāt*, and perhaps also the more popular newsletters, continued to lead a vigorous existence, forming a pool from which not only the printed newspapers but also the British administrators drew their information at least until the 1840s, and probably even beyond. The picture which thus emerges is much more complex than a simple colonial construction of knowledge, wielding and securing power through the displacement of indigenous intelligence by the invention of new structures. The *DUA* was, rather, the product of mutual encounters which led to a multiple intertwining of the self and the other, the indigenous and the colonial, the traditional and the modern. □

¹⁰Khushid, pp. 85-7.

Statistical Approach to the Debate on Urdu and Hindi (Student Paper)

RECENT debate on the relationship between Urdu and Hindi has mostly addressed cultural and cognitive differences. These differences have been observed on different cognitive verbal and non-verbal tasks and conclusions on the variability in language use and comprehension have been drawn from their results. In this paper, a different approach is presented. The pilot study which is described below examines statistical lexical distribution in electronic media speech. Tools for comparison of lexical data were developed to compile frequency lists for Urdu and Hindi. The lists were analyzed using a cross validation approach based on word frequencies. On the basis of these measurements, statistical analysis is able to establish the percentage difference between frequent words used in the two languages. The results are discussed in detail including correlation and principal components analysis. The paper concludes that there are interesting differences across the two languages on the measures studied and further research in this area is warranted.

A number of papers published in previous issues of the *AUS* addressed the emergence of Urdu and Hindi. In his article entitled "Some Notes on Hindi and Urdu" (No. 11), Ralph Russell agrees that the *one language, two scripts* approach to the issue is far from being true and natural. He analyzes several publications on Urdu and Hindi and the vocabulary presented in those publications. Russell concludes that Urdu and Hindi are two separate languages and he suggests that they be treated as such "despite their almost completely common structure and less completely common stock of everyday words" (p. 204). In his paper entitled "Urdu in India" (No. 17), David Matthews says that the relationship between Urdu and Hindi is "extremely complex, and in arguments deal-

ing with the sensitive issue of language the case is usually grossly oversimplified." He adds:

At the most basic level Hindi and Urdu, leaving aside their scripts, are virtually identical languages and serve admirably, as they always have done, as a valuable link between all South Asian communities wherever they may reside. At certain levels they are very different from each other and deserve separate treatment and study. (p. 157)

Matthews concludes that, considering the directions in which the two languages are going in India and Pakistan, with the course of time the two languages "will inevitably drift apart and there will be even less common ground between them than there is at present" (*ibid.*). Further Matthews draws a parallel with the linguistic situation in Ukraine, a former Soviet republic. However he is mistaken in saying that Ukrainian is "very closely related" to Russian. Recent research indicates that the linguistic difference between the vocabularies of Ukrainian and Russian is about 38 percent.¹ Notable is the fact that the difference between Russian and, for instance, Serbo-Croatian is 36 percent² yet no one has ever suggested that these two languages are closely related. Also, the lexical distance between, for instance, Italian and French is 30 percent, and between Spanish and Romanian is 57 percent (*ibid.*). According to Tyschenko, the difference between English and German is 49 percent, and the difference between Ukrainian and Polish is 30 percent.

The above-mentioned qualitative taxonomy data for European languages was obtained as a result of comparative analyses of the most frequent words used in those languages. The researchers employed comparative-historical methods that are based on universal laws. Modern science recognizes dynamic and statistical laws. A dynamic law reflects the dependence between separate states of an object, each of which predetermines the following one. A statistical law reveals the objective dependence between the batteries of similar and relatively independent things.³ Linguistic theory has had the knowledge of a number of objective statistical

¹Kostiantyn Tyschenko, *Metateoriya Movaзнавства* (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2000), p. 265.

²A. Shalkevich, *Gipotezy o Evropeiskikh Klassakh i Vozmozhnost Kalchivvennoi Taksonomii v Lingvistike // Gipoteza v Sovremennoi Lingvistike* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), p. 332.

³*Filosofskyi Slovar* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1973), p. 497.

laws and regularities which act in speech without reference to the will and awareness of speakers. These laws were discovered by stenographer Jean-Baptiste Estoup and philologist George K. Zipf, whose works were later deepened and expanded by linguists and mathematicians such as J. C. Willis, G. U. Yule, Benoit B. Mandelbrot, Gustav Herdan, S. C. Bradford, M. V. Arapov, M. M. Kherts and others. Observations of frequency dictionaries conducted by Zipf as early as the 1930s demonstrated that the use of words by people in speech is governed by a drive for optimizing the relationship between the requirement of diversity and the speaker's tendency to exert the least effort.⁴

Before I move on to the description of the research I did which employed a very simple but rather old and effective approach to comparing languages, I would like to step briefly into my personal history in Urdu studies. I began to learn Urdu in 1997, having studied Hindi at the Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University in Ukraine for two years. At first, really embarrassing for me was the close relationship between the two languages in terms of grammar and pronunciation on the one hand, and the "strange" need to select proper words for Urdu speech which would not sound Hindi, as was demanded by our Urdu lecturer who was a Pakistani, on the other. Further on, my interest in finding the borderline which would divide the vocabularies of the two languages grew to the extent that I decided to undertake research into the lexical differentiation between Urdu and Hindi.

To compare Hindi and Urdu I decided to put aside the visual and audible differences between the two languages and employ a comparative method to solve the problem. I have already mentioned above that statistics can help establish the lexical difference between languages. Through my personal observation I have come to the conclusion that in bilingual societies, like the one in Ukraine, speakers do not recognize the real difference between the two languages. In order to persuade speakers in Ukraine that Ukrainian and Russian are not as closely related as they are believed to be, I had to cite the statistics. In Ukraine, almost all the people have no difficulty understanding Russian, whether in everyday situations or in television and radio broadcasts. In other words, if a person speaks Russian, he/she will have no difficulty in communicating. However, the situation will be quite different for Russian speakers coming to

⁴George K. Zipf, *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology* (New York: Hafner, 1964).

Ukraine from abroad. If they have never lived in Ukraine for an extended period or studied Ukrainian, they will have great difficulty understanding Ukrainian, even in ordinary speech, not to mention the language used in the media.

I think that the linguistic situation in Hindi and Urdu speaking areas is similar to the one described above to some extent. Speakers in bilingual or monolingual societies do not recognize the real differences in the use of words in speech. It is a common assumption of non-linguists in India and Pakistan that the difference between Hindi and Urdu mostly lies in the use of different alphabets and the selection of proper words, i.e., Sanskrit-derived words for Hindi and Arabic and Persian words for Urdu.

The approach which was employed in my research is based on the statistical finding that different speech samples, including electronic media speech, follow a set of statistical laws, e.g., Zipf's law (1932), which makes them comparable on the basis of word frequencies. Zipf's law, named after the Harvard linguistics professor George Kingsley Zipf (1902-1950), is the observation that the frequency of occurrence of some event (P), as a function of the rank (n) when the rank is determined by the above frequency of occurrence, is a power-law function $P_n \sim 1/n^a$ with the exponent a close to unity.⁵ The most famous example of Zipf's law is the frequency of occurrence of words in a language. The formula for Zipf's law here is $rf = C$ where r is the rank of a word, f is the frequency of occurrence of the word, and C is a constant that depends on the text being analyzed.

Any two languages can be compared by contrasting the words that constitute their vocabularies. The issue crucial at this point is to select the right words so that the general picture will not be distorted. The most appropriate idea in this context is to compare the most frequent words used in both languages.

The universal statistic law, which was discovered by Zipf in 1932, is famous for its practical applications. For instance, according to Lidia Zadorina, by learning the 230 most frequent words of a language a student will be able to "recognize" one half of the words in any text; the 1000 most frequent words, two thirds of a text; and the 5000 most frequent words, 90 percent of a text.⁶ According to the Zipf-Guiraud law (1959), to

⁵Wentian Li, *Zipf's Law* (<http://linkage.rockefeller.edu/wli/zipf/>).

⁶L. Zadorina, ed., *Chitatelny Slovar Russkogo Yazyka* (Moscow: Russkiy Yazyk, 1977), pp. 895-915.

understand one half of any text a person needs to know the 1000 most frequent words, and for understanding two thirds of any text about 4000 of the most frequent words.⁷

The most recent frequency vocabulary I am aware of is the *Frequency Dictionary for Russian* that was compiled by Serge Sharoff in 2002.⁸ According to Sharoff, the 1000 most frequent lemmas cover 64.1 percent of word forms in texts, the 2000 most frequent lemmas cover 72 percent of word forms in texts, the 3000 most frequent cover 76.7 percent, and the 5000 most frequent cover 82.1 percent. While Zaslavina's dictionary is relatively small by modern standards, about 1 million words, the dictionary compiled by Sharoff is based on a 40 million word corpus. Statistical regularities are the basis of the structure of the vocabulary of any language or text. Zipf's law is a reflection of a specific property of the organization of human memory, which usually operates with more frequent language units in all cases of the spontaneous use of speech.

But let us now turn to Urdu and Hindi. It is obvious that the above mentioned laws can and should be used in the comparative analysis of the vocabularies of these two languages. The only thing we need is to have an instrument to work with. It is remarkable how little serious attention seems to have been paid to this task. As far as I know, there has been no comparison done between the two languages which was based on frequency lists. Since I was unable to find frequency dictionaries for Hindi and Urdu, though they may possibly exist, I decided to compile such lists on my own. At first, I wanted to compile frequency dictionaries based on modern Hindi and Urdu. I had hoped to take samples for the compilation of corpora from the Internet. However, I very soon discovered that Hindi and, even more so, Urdu resources on the Internet are limited. This led me to the conclusion that my research should be narrowed.

It's obvious that to count words in a text one needs to have appropriate tools. The main tool for my research was a computer application specifically designed to count the number of occurrences of every word form in a text. By processing the text through this application a list of all word forms found in the text is produced, arranged in descending order of the frequency of the occurrences of each form in the text. In the case of

⁷M. Lehnert, *Der Englische Grundwortschatz* (Leipzig: Veb Enzyklopädie, 1975), 5.6.

⁸Serge Sharoff, *Frequency Dictionary for Russian*, 2002 <<http://www.artins.ru/projects/freqlist/freqlist-en.asp>>.

Urdu and Hindi, the application only allowed for the recognition of word forms which I later had to manually bring together to lemmas (word forms used in dictionaries) using the MS Excel application. Since words appear in different forms in speech, I had to prevent them from being counted as separate words by means of *lemmatization*:

1. Verb forms were reduced to the infinitive.
2. Inflected forms of nouns were reduced to the nominative singular.
3. Inflected forms of adjectives were reduced to the nominative masculine singular.
4. Comparatives and superlatives of gradable adjectives were reduced to the absolute form.

All this was done manually with the help of the MS Excel application. For instance:

		freq		freq		freq		freq
Lemma:	sana		naya		rukṇ		party	
	sa	51	nac	195	rukṇ	77	partus	27
	sac	124	nacc	174	arkṇ	261	partuṇ	44
	sacc	46	naya	71	Total	438	party	548
	sarṇ	40	Total	440			Total	619
	sacN	26						
	sakar	31						
	sanc	171						
	saya	78						
	Total	569						

Only lemmas were included in the frequency lists, accompanied by the total frequency of the occurrence of a word.

The frequency lists for both Urdu and Hindi are based on corpora of about 440,000 words each. Since the application was only capable of counting words in one text, I had to collect a great number of small pieces into a corpus. Another technical issue at that stage was that all the pieces of the text in each corpus had to be encoded in the same format. Standards for encoding large lexical resources are under active development now, not only for Urdu and Hindi but also for other languages. However, since the original aim of my research required the availability of a large corpus for each of the two languages, this probably was the main reason I had to narrow my research. Since texts had to be encoded in one font, I needed to take the pieces from sites that used that font.

For Hindi, I decided to copy texts from *webdunia.com*. This site uses the namesake Hindi font which can be freely downloaded. It has an existing news service which is divided into three major categories: international, national, and regional. The corpus consists of Hindi news feeds taken from the three categories between July and September 2002. With Urdu, however, the issue was much more complicated. As is known, Urdu readers in Pakistan prefer to read newspapers published in a Nastaliq font. Many Internet-based Pakistani newspapers use, for instance, the InPage Noori Nastaliq system of Urdu calligraphy. However, the biggest problem here is that almost all the news feeds on Pakistani websites are published in a scanned version, which made them impossible to use in computer processing. I failed to find a Pakistani site which used encoded text. Finally, I decided the best solution was to use romanized Urdu news feeds. News in this format is published by one of Pakistan's largest newspapers, the daily *Jang* (*jang.net*). Its roman-letter Urdu news service is also divided into three categories: international, major (national), and regional. To obtain the approximately 440,000 words needed, I had to take all of the romanized Urdu news feeds published between May and November 2002.

By processing each corpus with the word counting computer application I was able to produce unlemmatized frequency lists. After the manual lemmarizing was completed it became possible to cross-check the words in the two lists. The 100 most frequent words for Hindi and Urdu used in the electronic media are as follows:

Table 1*

word rank	HINDI		URDU	
	frequency	word	frequency	word
1	43098	*ka	38143	*ka
2	24149	*hona	21514	*hona
3	15141	*meN	13718	*meN
4	10553	*ne	12413	*kanna
5	9346	*kama	9705	*ne
6	9210	*ko	9157	*gar

*Urdu and Hindi words that appear in this and the next table have been left untransliterated. They are spelled well enough to be easily recognized. —Editor

7	8893	*se	8886	*se
8	8134	* ana	7745	*ko
9	8039	*ki	7681	* ana
10	7139	*yah	6389	*par
11	6614	*aur	6118	*kch
12	5168	#ve	4680	*dena
13	4896	*par	4611	*yah
14	4545	*kahna	3841	*kahna
15	4019	*dena	3294	*wah
16	3178	*bhee	2908	*(ke)liyay
17	3106	*rahna	2479	*naheeN
18	3003	*nahiN	2421	*ek
19	2862	*ek	2018	*rahna
20	2661	*(ke) lie	1883	*jo
21	2135	*vah	1748	**sachar
22	1825	*lena	1729	*bhee
23	1630	*hee	1673	*lena
24	1586	*apna	1390	*Amreekee
25	1457	**chunaav	1315	**hukoomat
26	1416	**sarkaar	1266	*Bhaaratce
27	1374	*batana	1231	*koce
28	1368	*koce	1184	**mulk
29	1324	*baad	1181	*apna
30	1285	*jo	1168	**mutasbiq
31	1181	*parti	1168	**afraad
32	1149	*sakna	1149	halaaak
33	1100	**rajya	1111	**fauj
34	1079	#ve	1017	*hamlah
35	1072	**desh	989	*sakna
36	1031	*sah	981	*ba'd
37	1016	**log	966	*khilaaf
38	951	*lekin	890	*a

39	931	*rak	774	*general
40	927	*pahla	745	*police
41	912	**rashtrapati	736	*tak
42	902	**atankvadec	734	*jaarce
43	888	*maamla	698	**ijlaas
44	863	catha	674	faishah
45	862	**neta	672	**intekhaabaar
46	856	*ana	652	***ilaqaah
47	815	*to	643	*jabkeh
48	801	*chahna	627	*t
49	775	*pulis	624	**election
50	747	*do	619	*party
51	710	*haat	611	faujee
52	707	*banana	610	**qaumec
53	695	**beech	608	zakhmcc
54	686	**adhikari	599	rakhna
55	641	*vahan	569	*aana
56	615	**dvara	550	arah
57	615	#kaNgres	549	*to
58	603	*karana	542	*ham
59	601	**pradhanmaNtri	538	*banaana
60	583	**dal	534	*batana
61	571	*milna	531	#assembly
62	560	**varsh	528	**ghaur
63	550	**adhyaksha	527	*saath
64	548	*baare	526	*shuroo'
65	546	**maNtri	487	*dauraan
66	544	*hamla	481	dehshat gardeec
67	543	*saj	476	**maal
68	540	**kaaran	476	muraakraz
69	536	**baithak	470	siyaasce
70	526	**anya	468	dhamakah

71	523	*aisa	466	**tamaam
72	521	*amerikee	463	*hee
73	520	*teen	450	**darmiyaan
74	518	**purv	450	muslim
75	517	**mukhyamaNtri	448	*baat
76	514	*dauran	447	*4
77	510	**anusaar	446	*rupe
78	510	*kuchh	446	*5
79	506	*tarah	442	*donoN
80	496	**sahhee	441	samer
81	495	**suraksha	440	*naya
82	494	*peora	431	**haal
83	493	*maarna	426	taur
84	492	**samay	424	*Pakistani
85	490	*bharatiy	421	iang
86	484	**soora	417	*parifaar
87	483	*ab	414	sarhad
88	480	*khilaaf	392	kasheedgee
89	478	*baatchee	389	Israeli
90	477	*naya	382	court
91	458	**sadaaya	376	mazeed
92	457	*jaaree	372	khiraab
93	435	**sthiti	372	league
94	442	**din	371	**jamaa'at
95	442	**roop	368	chief
96	439	*donoN	366	*kaam
97	434	*shaamil	366	*chaashna
98	428	**aarop	362	saaham
99	425	*kam	362	firing
100	420	*shuroo	357	*kam
101	418	**kshetr	355	tarjumaan
102	414	**saNgathan	352	commission

Total	245342	233272	
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Note: 1) words marked * matched fully; 2) words marked ** did not match; 3) words marked ## mean names of institutions and were not compared; 4) words marked # partially matched but were not included in the results; 5) words not marked were not compared. Names of people and geographical places were not included in the list.

The first 100 words in the Hindi list constitute 35.61 percent of the Hindi corpus which was made up of 441,135 words. The first 100 words in the Urdu list account for 30.64 percent of the Urdu corpus which included 440,929 words.

Since the frequencies of words which mean the same things are different in Hindi and Urdu, I chose to make the comparison on the basis of the Hindi frequency list. Words were taken from the Hindi list one by one from the very top to the bottom and equivalents for them were found in the Urdu list. It may be seen from Table 1 that the ranks of the first three words in Hindi and Urdu are the same. Further, words in the Hindi list matched fully with their equivalents in Urdu until the word ranked twenty-fifth. It can also be seen from Table 1 that some words of Persian and Arabic origin are used both in Hindi and Urdu, such as *masala*, *hamla*, *khilaf*, etc.

The comparison results obtained for words which mean the same thing are arranged in the following table:

Table 2

HINDI			URDU		
word rank	frequency	word	word rank	frequency	word
25	1457	chanav	45	673	intekhaabaz
			42	624	election
26	1416	parkar	25	1315	hukoomat
33	1100	raja	32	610	qaume
			28	287	qam
			270	239	soobah
			349	227	riyaset
35	1072	desh	28	1184	mulk
37	1046	dog	31	1168	afraad
41	911	rashtrapati	21	1811	sadar
42	902	atankvader	182	226	dehshat gard
45	861	neta	206	244	rahnuma

			293	145	leader
53	625	beech	71	490	darmiyaan
54	686	adhiikaree	153	362	sarkaaree
			1040	30	'ohdedaar
56	615	dvara	710	66	zaric'
59	601	pradhan- mantri	137	292	vazeer-e-as'sam
60	583	dal	24	371	jamaa'at
			226	178	group
62	560	varsh	67	476	sail
63	550	adhyakshya	192	211	chairman
64	546	mantri	640	75	vazeer
68	540	karan	225	178	vajah
69	536	baithak	43	698	ijlaas
70	526	anya	62	328	ghair
74	518	purv	187	214	sashiq
			911	54	mashriqee
75	517	mukhya- mantri	1854	24	vazeer-e-s'ala
77	510	anusaar	30	1168	mutasbiq
80	496	sabhi	71	466	tamaam
81	491	saraksha	286	219	security
84	492	samay	71	238	wagt
86	484	sutr	231	301	'araz'
91	478	sadasya	211	318	rakn
93	471	ahiti	82	431	haal
94	442	din	230	302	roz
95	442	rup	581	83	surat
98	428	prop	126	310	alraam
101	418	kshetr	46	652	'ilaaqah
102	414	sangathan	207	500	tanzeem

Note. Some of the words in the Hindi list have several meanings for which Urdu equivalents were found. Such Urdu words are shaded.

It can be seen from Table 2 that a total of 34 words in the list of the 100 (102) most frequent Hindi words did not match with Urdu words of the same meaning and had to be translated.

Conclusion

The research reported in this paper led to several conclusions. First, we may conclude that one third of the 100 most frequent words used in Hindi and Urdu are different. We must remember, however, that the corpora were compiled on the basis of news feeds that appeared in the electronic media, therefore this conclusion cannot be taken as evidence that the lexical distance between the modern Hindi and Urdu languages is about 30 percent. Still, it does suggest that further research may be warranted to establish the level of differentiation between Hindi and Urdu. Second, the approach used in this pilot study is useful since the two languages can be easily compared on the basis of word frequencies.

Third, the frequency lists that were obtained can be used for the compilation of bilingual dictionaries. Also, the lists can and should be used in teaching Hindi and Urdu, especially in the development of student books. As has been mentioned above, by learning the most frequent words students can greatly reduce the time needed for achieving proficiency in either language. Another important contribution of this research is that corpora for Hindi and Urdu have now been compiled in an electronic format.

In this paper I have tried to briefly present the details of one method for the comparison of the vocabularies of Hindi and Urdu as used in the electronic media. Although I had very limited funds and had to do everything completely on my own, I hope that my findings will help arouse interest among linguists for conducting further research in this area. □

*T*HE *S*HORT *S*TORIES OF



*N*AIYER *M*ASUD



On Reading Two Recent Stories of Naiyer Masud

WHEN I READ "Jā-Nashīn"¹ ("The Heir"), I realized that I could understand Naiyer Masud's earlier story "Bād-Numā"² ("The Weather Vane") much better. I decided to translate both, for several reasons, which I will explain. I had been working on a paper on chronograms in Urdu poetry and in researching the *abjad*³ I stumbled upon the divinatory use, among others, of alpha numeration. I was drawn into reading about the divinatory methods of *jafar*⁴ and *ramal*⁵ which fascinated me as much as

"Jā-Nashīn" was published in the Urdu journal *Shab-Khān* (Allahabad), No. 250 (Nov. 2001), pp. 7–10. Naiyer Masud, not happy with the response of readers, who found the story abrupt and underdeveloped, rewrote the piece in *Shab-Khān*, No. 260 (Sept. 2002), pp. 15–20. On comparing the two drafts of the story, I thought the revised version didn't improve the original. The latter opens with snatches of a macabre conversation: "I was about to step into the foyer but I held myself back as a voice from the front room could be heard: 'Look, here, see all my intestines are wrapped around my ankles, and this man, my elder brother says its nothing, just a figment of my imagination. Please look closely, please look, can you see something?'" The story is virtually the same; in fact weaker, more diluted than before.

¹"Bād-Numā" was first published in the *AUS*, No. 25 (2000), pp. 630–64.

²When used numerically, the letters of the Arabic alphabet have a special order, called the *Abjad* or *Abujad*. The *abjad* is an acronym referring to *alif, bā, jīm, dal*, the first four letters in the numerical order, which in the system most widely used runs from *alif* to *ghayn*.

³*Jafar* or *Jafar* is the art of divination drawing as its source the book of *Jafar* ascribed to the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

⁴*Ramal* or *ramal*, is an art of divination based on reading figures in sand or on the ground.

*mu'amma*⁶ and other enigmas related to alpha numeration. The baffling science of numbers and the mystique associated with it revived many childhood memories for me.

I began this brief essay by drawing on my childhood reminiscences of magical practices and illusions since those memories were the first reactions that "Jā-Nashīn" evoked in me. I found in the explicit engagement with mystic-magic practices in "Jā-Nashīn" a perspective with which I could approach the enigma of the earlier story "Bād-Numā." Read together, they reminded me of the larger issue of connectivity and intertextuality in Masud's fiction, which was subtly manifested in his first collection of short stories, *Simiyā*.⁷ This volume is prefaced with a quote from Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, the assumed author of the *Book of Jafar*, and in the title story there is the use of the spell *simiyā* which is practiced by a mad occultist. "Bād-Numā" also reminded me of "Vaḡfa"⁸ ("The Interregnum"), the construction of an insignia motif, and its implications. Masud admits to his penchant for reworking plots of earlier stories and "nudging them forward." His stories often feel incomplete, "needing to be continued." While this may not be obvious in a casual reading, because the plots themselves are vague, the connectedness is at a level more profoundly rooted in the cultural subtext of which this fiction is made.

In "Bād-Numā" there were several irksome questions that needed to be addressed in order to satisfy my understanding of the story: What exactly is the relationship between the weather vane, the narrator's father and the visitors in the front room? Why are these visitors so concerned about the weather vane? Why does the narrator's father receive so many visitors? Why is there an air of mystery surrounding the identity of the weather vane's maker? Does the malaise that affects the father of the narrator correspond to the malfunctioning of the weather vane? And, who is

⁶*Mu'amma*, literally, something made obscure or hidden. This could be in one of two ways: in the sense of word puzzle or riddle or in the sense of secret writing, code.

⁷*Simiyā* (Lucknow: Nuzrat Publishers, 1984) is Naiyer Masud's first collection of short fiction. It comprises five stories including the title story "Simiyā."

⁸"Vaḡfa" appears in Naiyer Masud's second collection of short stories *Ṭir-e Kayf* (Lucknow: Nuzrat Publishers, 1990), pp. 105–31. Muhammad Umar Memon subsequently translated it, for which, see "Interregnum," *AUS*, No. 12 (1997), pp. 95–110.

the woman on the terrace? I must admit that despite being puzzled by these questions I enjoyed the story and read it out loud to my son who enjoys listening to anything associated with the supernatural. In doing so I realized that I was subconsciously reading the story as a "ghost story." A year later I read "Ji-Nashin" and felt that my perceptions were validated because I perceived an affinity between the two stories.

In "Ji-Nashin," like in "Bād-Numā," we are informed by the narrator of visitors who are received by the head of the household, (uncle, father) in the front room. However, we are alerted from the start that the narrator's uncle is an occultist and visitors are for the most part men and women who are afflicted or possessed by something paranormal. There is a direct reference to jinns and mystical-magical practices. Going back to "Bād-Numā," I speculated whether the visitors in this story too had something to do with the occult. Consider this excerpt:

Visitors, as I mentioned earlier, came to see my father in large numbers. Among them would be new faces I would see once or twice and never see again. But, besides these interim visitors, there were people who would regularly come by almost every day. If any one of the regular visitors missed a turn, my father would sometimes in an admonishing and sometimes anxious manner inquire how they had been. Most of these visitors were from our neighborhood, and their houses were close to ours. But I rarely saw them walking on the streets or in the lanes. However, when I went on the roof to fly my kite, I would see some of them on the roofs of their houses, mostly in winter, and they would be sunning themselves. At that time they would be dressed in ordinary plain clothes. But these very people, when they came out to visit us, would be dressed from head to toe in highly formal clothing as though they were invited for a special occasion. And my father too did the same. Whenever someone came to call on him he would get dressed in full formal attire and then go receive the guests in the visitor's room. But when he started virtually living in that room, he gave up that custom and now, instead of changing clothes, he would draw his wrap right up to his shoulders when a visitor came.⁹

Reading more mystic-magic into the story I now wondered whether the weather vane had been fashioned by the ubiquitous jinns and was a talisman, a signifier of a special location. Perhaps it was not fashioned by

⁹"Bād-Numā," p. 657. All translations from this story and "Ji-Nashin" are mine.

human hands, and that is why it could not be repaired. I tried to read more meaning into the allusions in the story that the weather vane could change the wind's direction. I couldn't dismiss the obvious inference that the weather vane was a metaphor for the old order and resisted winds of change. Nevertheless, it was difficult to ignore the surrealistic interludes infiltrating the story compelling an intertextual mystic-magic reading. For example, in the following excerpt from "Bâd-Namâ," what does one make of the mysterious woman who appears on the terrace at night? (It is unclear whether it is night or day.)

I saw the weather vane gleaming, on and off. With each flash of lightning it would come into view looking like a delicate thing wrought in silver. I went up close to examine it. It was still frozen in its strange position. There was no murmuring or any other sound to be heard coming from it. I was in the process of examining it from different angles when I became aware of someone standing on the roof adjoining ours. Her face was sporadically lighting up by the flashing lightning. (p. 662)

The two stories end on somewhat similar notes.

I cleaned out the front room and took his chair. [...] Slowly, patients have started to trickle in. ("B-Nashîn," p. 10)

I don't get as many visitors as my father did. These visitors keep changing and they only come to my place when they need something done or I need something from them. ("Bâd-Namâ," p. 664)

Masud contests the idea that his stories can be categorized as "fantastic."

As for fantasy, I try very hard to steer clear of it. My stories are not fantasies, at least not in the sense of the fantastic. You cannot say their events don't occur in real life.¹⁰

However, he does acknowledge the influence of Kafka—whom he has also translated—and Poe on his fiction. The most famous text that can be placed in the category of the *fantastic* is Kafka's "Metamorphosis."

"Fantastic," in Todorov's definition, refers to literary texts which hover uneasily between the two certainties of the uncanny and the mar-

¹⁰Asif Farrukhi, "A Conversation with Nayyer Masud," tr. Muhammad Umar Memon, *AUS*, No. 11 (1997), p. 168.

velous, creating an agnostic limbo of the undecidable. In the twenty-five years since the first publication of *The Fantastic*,¹¹ Todorov's generic distinctions have identified "the deconstructive moment of the fantastic as an important if elusive aspect of the writing of the unreal."¹² Yet it is very difficult to find examples that fit this definition. Todorov says that the reader and the hero must decide if a certain event or phenomenon belongs to reality or to imagination; that is, whether or not it is real. Christine Brooke-Rose suggests that the pure fantastic is not so much an evanescent genre as an evanescent element; the hesitation as to the supernatural can last a short or long moment and disappear with an explanation.¹³ Both "Jā-Nashīn" and "Bād-Numā" may be seen as fitting examples of Todorov's definition.

Surprisingly, after a year, Najyer Masud released a second draft of "Jā-Nashīn" for publication. Apparently, readers dissatisfied with the original story wrote to Masud expressing their frustration. The reworked version includes more samples of macabre experiences. The story is more diluted than in the first version. The snuffing off of characters when they become unwieldy sometimes weakens Masud's storytelling. In "Jā-Nashīn," an important character Nafisa dies of a depression, almost inexplicably, probably because Masud does not know how else to adjust her in the plot. Maybe my reading of the two stories as complementary to one another is arbitrary and other readers see them as distinctive and separate stories. Still, I would argue that the two stories make more sense when read consecutively. I've used "Jā-Nashīn" to resolve some of the

¹¹Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, tr. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973). Todorov discusses the *fantastic* more fully in chapter 2, "Definition of the Fantastic," pp. 25–40. "The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty" (p. 25), and "The fantastic requires fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character. [...] Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he/she will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations" (p. 33).

¹²For a continuing redefinition of Todorov's work see, Neil Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Goethe to Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 11–41.

¹³Cf. her *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 71.

vagueness that "Bâd-Numâ" held for me. Masud himself admits that he feels a need to continue reworking his stories. Maybe the mystic-magic reading of both is subjective to my own experience. Perhaps the intertextuality was more obvious to me because of my childhood experiences and my own projection into the role of the child protagonist in these stories. Reading a text that referenced *jafar*, *ramâl*, *naqsh* and *ar'wah* reminded me of the connection between mundane life and its symbiosis with the supernatural. While "Ja-Nashin" may not be Masud's best piece of short fiction, it deploys a fantastical-real narrative. The texts' grounding in South Asian Islamic beliefs regarding evil and the supernatural, also calls for attention. For all these reasons I chose to translate the stories and share the unanswered questions with readers in the West. □

Snake Catcher*

Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?

—WILLIAM BLAKE

Lah-e-lah-e-lah-e-lah-e-lah-e-lah-e-lah
Sā? sa mighlāl sa-rā mighlāl

—RUMI, *Magnat*

I

“SNAKE CATCHER! SNAKE CATCHER!”

The cry would echo in the stillness of the night. The caller was sometimes an old man, sometimes a youth, sometimes a woman, and sometimes a child, so one might assume these cries would be quite different, but to me they always sounded the same.

“Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!”

Whenever the cry rang out in the still night I was unable to figure out who the caller was. The call had the same quivering fear of death that spread across age and gender. I would be awakened from a deep sleep and know that a snake had bitten someone. A slight shudder would sweep through my body and I would want to go back to sleep and think of it as something I’d only heard in my dream. Just then I would feel the cold touch of two fingers on my neck and hear a faint “The cry’s up” very close to my ear.

* From the author’s first collection, *Sims* (Lucknow: Nusrat Publishers, 1984), pp. 61–126.

This obliged me to get out of my bed. By then the cry would have moved closer, now mixed with other voices.

"Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

The sound of countless shuffling feet accompanied the cry; I would approach the door and open it, allowing in a small crowd of people. Some of them would be supporting a dying man. Sometimes one of them held a stick in his hand with a dead snake dangling from it. The sight made me shudder again. At that time, I had to deal with the crowd all by myself. I would make a space on the ground, and the dying man was laid out there. I would untoll a long—about the length of two men—narrow mat right beside him on which the uncoiled dead snake was then placed. I would grope around the dying man's body looking for the wound and, after I had found it, I would make him lie in such a way that the wound was accessible. I never asked how the snake had bitten him; still, some people went to great lengths relating the entire incident. They all spoke at once so I was never entirely able to hear about the actual incident. And besides, only a handful could describe it anyway. The one who had been through it all lay on the ground unconscious or simply mute with terror, so people spent more energy enlarging upon how they got the news and what they were doing at the time. As they continued talking they watched my usual routines, with their eyes roaming around searching for someone else the whole time.

Shortly afterward the Snake Catcher would appear before them and everyone would immediately become attentive to him, a whisper sweeping through the crowd from one end to the other.

"Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

For a while he would remain absolutely silent, paying attention to no one. The people would also remain quiet, allowing their gaze to rest on him. Then he always asked the same question, "What happened?"

In response, the people didn't speak all at once, as though they had silently struck a deal among themselves and now only one of them would start slowly and, using a minimum of words, tell him what had happened. But it seemed as though the Snake Catcher didn't hear a single thing the man said. His eyes were fixed on the snake lying stretched out on the mat with its hood often terribly crushed. He always looked at the snake wistfully, sometimes even giving the impression that he considered the snake his patient. These moments felt inordinately long. Only then did he take notice of the victim, and I also looked closely at the victim's face for the first time along with him.

The face would be covered with beads of sweat. Sometimes the victim would be completely unconscious, but, even so, something like colors seemed to flow quickly just underneath the skin. Sometimes he was conscious, but appeared terribly frightened. Sometime he seemed to be struck simultaneously by drowsiness and fear; I don't recall ever seeing fear and drowsiness together on anyone's face except that of a snakebite victim.

The victims could be of any age or gender, but the face of just about every victim invariably reflected a strange sense of his or her importance, as if being bitten by a snake was a personal achievement which no one else was capable of matching. I never saw despair on any victim's face, perhaps because once a victim had made it to the Snake Catcher alive he never died, and usually walked back on his own feet.

Now and then though, a victim went back as a corpse, but this happened only when he had already died en route to the Snake Catcher. The victim of a snakebite looks utterly dead when he dies; there's no need to even look at his face to confirm his death. Nevertheless the people who carry a victim can only be convinced of his death after they have brought him over to the Snake Catcher. Usually on such occasions I would know before the Snake Catcher's arrival that the victim was already dead. The skin of some victims had burst open. The people accompanying such victims didn't show much enthusiasm for talking about the incident before the Snake Catcher's arrival. They would just look at me intently trying to gauge the condition of the patient, but I tried not to let anything show on my face. The Snake Catcher would arrive. First he would look for the mat but it wouldn't be in its place because I never saw a dead victim brought in along with the snake that had killed him. Only after that would the Snake Catcher look closely at the victim and then at me, and I would know what he wanted. I would unroll another mat that stood in a corner and throw it over the victim. After a few moments of total silence the Snake Catcher would leave the scene. The people would then pick up the dead body. I would remove the mat from on top of the body, roll it up and return it to the corner, and they would walk out carrying the corpse with them. They would start out in perfect silence but the minute they stepped out the door the sound of someone wailing would surely be heard.

This happened rarely however. Usually a victim was rushed to the Snake Catcher before he had turned cold. In that event, the Snake Catcher wouldn't let him die, regardless of what kind of snake had bitten him. Whether the culprit accompanied its victim or not, the Snake Catcher would know with just one glance what kind of snake it had been.

In the first place, most victims had not been bitten by a poisonous snake, but their own fear pretty much did them in. Any plain, colored water would have sufficed to put them back on their feet. But the Snake Catcher would put them through a truly painful ordeal, sometimes scotching the spot that had been bitten and sometimes using sharp, pointed instruments to make incisions in the wound which he then filled with certain kinds of medicinal powders that made the victims start to scream and thrash about. However, on a sign from him, several people would grab the victim tightly and muffle his cries. Something resembling a riot continued for a while and during this time the Snake Catcher turned his attention back to the dead snake. Eventually a daze would sweep over the victim and the people would carry him away.

But for those actually bitten by a poisonous snake, the Snake Catcher had any number of treatments. These changed according to the type and kind of offending snake. He smeared the wounds of some victims with a certain kind of clay which he also diluted with water and made the person drink. On other wounds he applied the frothy juice from the freshly crushed green bark of some tree. On still others, he would suck out a fair amount of blood and then dribble a few drops of some medication, which I'm certain contained venom collected from some other kind of snake.

If, however, a victim had been bitten by a snake which was so venomous, or the venom from a snake had spread through his bloodstream to such an extent that no antidote would work, the Snake Catcher didn't even attempt to treat him with medicine. Instead, he took out his bezoar. The bezoar always performed uniformly and never failed.

I first observed the workings of the bezoar on myself—at least now it seems that I did.

2

I was running away from a dead girl. I didn't even know for certain whether she was really dead, still I was running away from her. I left my house far behind, then even my hometown. New settlements appeared; these, too, I left behind and now I was facing the jungle.

For some time already I had given up thinking altogether, but I stood there facing the jungle and spent a long time thinking. Right across from me was a corridor of trees and bushes that became darker up ahead, and I knew nothing about it. I was on a slight elevation and this jungle corridor was sloping downward. I had to make up my mind whether to enter it or

not. But before that, I had to make up my mind about the dead girl—whether she was actually dead or had merely appeared to be dead. And I had to decide this not on the basis of the events but strictly on the basis of my own inclination. I was caught in the worst dilemma. In fact, I was even having difficulty deciding what it was I wanted to decide in the first place. I spent an entire night thinking, but when it was morning I was still unsure whether I was running away from her because I thought she was alive or because I thought she was dead. I wished that what happened hadn't happened. While I was wishing for this, I fell asleep and dreamt that what had actually happened hadn't really happened at all. Because of this I started to fall asleep in my dream, and I woke up.

I stepped into the jungle immediately.

This was my first encounter with the jungle. Here, the atmosphere felt damp, and continued to get damper and damper as I moved forward. I was wading through old trees and withered vines. Small pathways had been opened between the crooked lines of trees but they were covered with a meshwork of countless roots, thick and thin, that jutted out from the earth making it difficult to relate the roots to their corresponding trees, although now and then I came upon a dead tree and some root in the meshwork snapped under my feet letting me know that it, in fact, belonged to that tree.

The jungle didn't frighten me. I only encountered a few animals. When they sensed my footsteps, the small ones darted into the bushes where they would stand staring at me with wide-eyed wonder, reminding me of shy children. I saw innocence and bewilderment in the eyes of all the jungle animals. I didn't encounter any that were ferocious.

For some distance I looked around at the jungle with interest. Then I was reminded of the curios neatly arranged in the outer reception room of my house. I couldn't remember exactly what those curios were so I tried hard to recall each and every one of them.

One was a tiger made of some kind of metal. It stood on its hind legs with its mouth wide open as though it were roaring. Its eyes were crafted from some precious stone and they had disappeared several generations before me. Yet the tiger's only importance lay in its missing eyes. Close by the tiger, but larger than it, was a horse molded from some reddish-brown material with a rider of the same material mounted on it. One of the rider's hands was poised in the manner of someone wielding a sword, but the hand was empty. The sword of that empty hand was sorely missed.

but an elder of the family used to say that the rider had, in fact, held a scale, not a sword, in that hand. In my own time, mostly due to my own carelessness, the upper half of the rider's body had also broken off and a clever artisan had been commissioned to put it back together. I remember that when the upper half came off, it revealed that the inside material was of a rather dark red color and it gave off a strange scent which conjured up memories of old things when it was inhaled. On the wall across from the tiger and the rider hung a crab fashioned from numerous tiny chips of animal horn. The pieces had been put together in such a way that the slightest touch made the entire crab wobble and appear as if it were crawling along the wall. I hated this crab; sometimes I even feared it. It was a specimen of a craft practiced by some lost tribe whose name I could never remember.

The curios in the reception room also included a miniature palace built from tiny stone bricks of different colors. It was a complete palace with arches, columns, turrets, etc. The turrets, especially, were exceedingly beautiful and guests often marveled at the delicate workmanship of their ornamental serratures. It used to be said about this palace that at some point in time there really was a full-scale likeness of it, the ruins of which could still be seen, and that the miniature had been made to serve as a model for the actual palace. But some elders said that it was when the actual palace was destroyed that its builder made this miniature to keep the memory of the other palace alive. Now and then this miniature even came up for discussion among the elders. They would speculate in increasingly novel ways about the possible reasons for the palace's destruction and about the age of its architect, without ever resolving whether the miniature was the model for or the memorial of its life-size likeness. But at least this much was certain: there used to be a full-scale palace, in every respect exactly like its miniature counterpart, which had crumbled and, for that reason, the miniature was now considered only a memorial.

I often stood in front of the miniature palace and stared at it for so long that it began to look like the real, life-size palace. Not only that, I even heard sounds of life filtering out of it. Then, abruptly, I would regain control of myself and the palace would shrink back down with a jolt. Later on, I resolved to build myself a real palace patterned after it. I even informed the elders and guests in the reception room about my resolve and solicited their opinion about the changes I was considering making.

However, the most prominent among the reception room's curios was a palanquin sitting on top of an octagonal table in the center of the

room. The table had been built especially for it. Made from a variety of metals and woods, the palanquin had layer upon layer of curtains, fashioned out of extremely fine, colorful fabric, over its doors. These were drawn back by cords with large tassels revealing a space strewn with assorted cushions of various shapes. Tiny silver and gold vessels lay beside those cushions. I never could figure out the purpose for even one of them. Miniscule bells made of an exceptionally delicate metal hung from the palanquin's ceiling. These could often be heard tinkling softly, but only when the conversation in the reception room suddenly stopped. Then the tinkling of bells seemed to fill the entire room. The softness of the sound was another matter. It seemed as if the bells weren't tinkling softly somewhere nearby, but rather that they were echoes from bells ringing loudly somewhere quite far off.

The palanquin was the last curio to be added to the collection in the reception room—the only addition made after I'd reached the age of discernment and understanding and, from that point of view, it was also the first addition. Somebody who looked a bit wild had brought it and had also stayed on with us for a while to oversee its suitable placement in the reception room, including the construction of the octagonal table. He revealed nothing about the palanquin's antiquity. A few of the guests believed that it was several hundred years old, however some merchants asserted that it was, in fact, a specimen of the workmanship of the wild fellow himself and that it only appeared to be ancient. Still, no one doubted that if any one man had crafted this palanquin, he must have spent more or less his entire life doing it. At first the wild one was shown great hospitality, but later he was thrown out of our house in terrible disgrace, the reason for which I never discovered. In any case, the palanquin remained in its place on the octagonal table in the center of the reception room. Its greatest virtue—so it was claimed, though I had difficulty fathoming it—being that it drew all the other curios to itself, curios which before had seemed to scurry every which way. In the beginning, whenever the palanquin was mentioned in our house, the wild fellow was also invariably mentioned, but slowly all reference to him was dropped. The last time I heard him mentioned was when news arrived that a snake had bitten him.

At this point the thought that there could be snakes in the jungle occurred to me for the first time.

I was in a part of the jungle where green vines were spread out over the tree trunks and the ground. These vines had large, dark green leaves with light green protruding veins and they were so succulent that when they were bent they snapped in the middle, releasing jets of water. And, in fact, the atmosphere there was suffused with exceedingly fine sprays of water. In short, that area of the jungle was completely different from the places where the presence of snakes might be suspected. But it was precisely here that the thought of snakes occurred to me and I began to imagine their presence near every moving leaf, so much so that it became difficult for me to press ahead. I stood there surrounded by a sea of green vines. The movement of their leaves resembled the rise and fall of waves, and the objects below them, which seemed to be crawling toward me, made it difficult even to stand. I scanned the area for a clearing but there were green vines around me and it was impossible to tell where the terrain rose and fell beneath their large succulent leaves. That the terrain was uneven was beyond a doubt. I remembered how several times, as I trudged forward, I had been plunged up to my waist in leaves and, wading through these leaves with my hands, I had to climb up a slope. That is to say, the sensation of wading through the leaves was still fresh on my hands. At that moment I stood rooted to the ground, finding it difficult even to budge. Suddenly something stirred close to my feet and, without determining its direction, I moved. I stepped on something which was alive and which became even more alive. I felt a sort of prick on my foot. There was a movement in the leaves and a hood rose from beneath them. For a brief second I saw tiny eyes staring at me and then I heard what sounded like someone sighing nearby. Meanwhile, the hood dived under the leaves. The leaves swayed and I saw a long, slithering body retreat. The leaves churned violently and continued being churned up for some ways into the distance.

I felt that something warm had filled my ears. I started to wonder what it might be. Finally I shook my head. I realized a snake had bitten me. For a long time this thought attempted to become fixed in my mind in some way or other. I was feeling somewhat irritated. I already thought that there were snakes in that area and that I was within their striking range. This, perhaps, also gave me the strange belief that I was safe from them. My irritation arose precisely because this belief proved to be wrong. How did it happen that there actually was a snake where I had only suspected there might be one? But by then that warm thing in my ears had increased and I was once again overwhelmed by the thought that a snake

had bitten me. A strong desire to be at home took hold of me and I started to run.

I was running in the direction I had walked in earlier, quite oblivious to the fact that I was, in this way, heading farther away from my home. I had definitely concluded that the faster I ran the sooner I would reach home, and several times I, in fact, imagined that the twists and turns of the jungle were familiar pathways around my house. Soon enough I was exhausted. I felt that something was slowly tightening around my body. I stopped. I was feeling sleepy, but I didn't want to sleep. The absence of another human in this jungle began to weigh heavily on me. My body had begun to sway from drowsiness. At one point I saw something resembling a black wall rising up in front of me. When I tried to look at it closely, it disappeared. At the same time, I felt that black walls were rising up on either side of me. Within seconds the first wall in front also reappeared, and then all of them fused together. Black walls surrounded me on all sides. They were not only shrinking gradually, they were also becoming taller as a mysterious silence and darkness wafted out from them and spread everywhere.

In that spreading silence I heard a voice: "Where did it go?"

I don't know how but I understood that the question was about the snake and was directed at me.

Meanwhile the voice asked again, "What kind was it?"

I had no desire to respond to the question. It didn't even seem odd to me that I was trapped, as I was, within those black walls. Now, someone was feeling all over on my body. I heard another question: "Where did it bite you?"

I lay motionless, aware of someone's presence near me. Someone slowly lifted my eyelids and then let go. Someone tried, unsuccessfully, to hoist me up and carry me somewhere. A final wave of drowsiness swept over me, but, before sinking into the darkness, I heard a piercing scream right next to my ear: "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

That was the first, and also the last time that the residents of the hamlet heard the Snake Catcher call out his own name. What transpired next has been related to me so many times that I can describe it as an eyewitness. Why, there are times when I imagine that I did actually witness everything myself.

The Snake Catcher's scream shot out of the jungle and carried all the way to the hamlet where the residents immediately rushed out. Although

none of them was sure who had raised the cry, they all at least knew that a snake had bitten someone and that they had to carry the victim to the Snake Catcher. When they entered the mouth of the jungle, they found the Snake Catcher, his body scraped in several places, struggling to carry me on his back. The people from the hamlet quickly picked me up and ran back, just as they had come. The Snake Catcher kept abreast of them about half the way and then collapsed, so the people had to lug him too. They were terrified. When this procession entered the hamlet, a commotion swept across its entire length and, without anyone breathing a word, the news spread that a snake had bitten the Snake Catcher and that he had probably also died. However, when he came near his home the Snake Catcher started to walk on his feet. He opened the door himself and, by the time the people had stretched me out on the ground, he had already returned from the inner part of the house with the bezoar and the milk pot and was standing near my head. He searched for the wound over my entire body and pinched the two tiny holes located just above my left heel. He then took out the bezoar, which looked like a piece of some dark-colored stone. He touched the wound with it lightly. The wound pulled the stone toward it like a magnet and stuck to it—a clear signal that the snake's victim could still be saved. He started to pour milk from a small vessel over the wound, a drop at a time. A whisper swept through the crowd that still stood there dazed: "The bezoar is sucking the poison!"

The bezoar remained fastened to the wound for a short time and then came unstuck and fell down. Somebody informed someone else: "The poison has permeated the bezoar; it's fallen unconscious."

The Snake Catcher tossed the bezoar into the large milk pot. Another whisper went around: "Now it'll release the poison in the milk and refresh itself."

The Snake Catcher removed the bezoar from the pot and touched it against the wound once more. Again it became stuck there. Shortly afterward it came loose and fell unconscious, was again placed in the pot of milk, again removed and applied to the wound, and again it stuck to it. This routine was repeated several times and each time the whisper "Until it has sucked the poison out of every vein, it will go on sticking to the wound," was passed around. Finally, one time when the bezoar was removed from the milk and brought in contact with the wound, it didn't stick to it and rolled off. At that moment my body moved.

Only then did the hamlet's residents turn their attention to me: Who was I? What should be done with me? Before they started discussing the

matter, the Snake Catcher, without raising his head, said, "Leave him with me."

3

For several days I remained suspended in a state somewhere between sleep and wakefulness. The Snake Catcher visited me two or three times every day. He would stand beside my head looking at me intently. He also made me drink a certain extract several times. Finally one day he stood me on my feet and signaled me to follow him. I was thinking that I would have difficulty walking, but after taking a step I realized that I was my usual self. I didn't talk to the Snake Catcher however.

He made me go once around the entire hamlet. It was a small settlement and it looked more or less deserted to me at the time. When we came to the pathway leading out of the hamlet, he seized hold of my hand and started taking such giant strides that I almost had to run to keep up with him. Before long I began to breathe unevenly and started to sweat all over. He stopped after a while and stared at my face for the longest time. We started moving again and soon found ourselves at the mouth of the jungle. Here the Snake Catcher again looked at me intently for a long time and then grabbed my hand and led me into the jungle.

The same sea of green vines was surging before me as I wondered how on earth I had managed to get right into the middle of it and, if I actually had, how had I then managed to get out of it at all. At the moment, plunging into the vines seemed an impossibility. Although it was a bit sparse right at that spot, the jungle became progressively denser in some of the patches up ahead. No matter which direction we turned in, I always saw someone or other there. It seemed that humans, rather than animals, inhabited this jungle.

All of these men were busy with some kind of work. I saw one old man digging whitish roots out of the crumbly soil. Two men stood under a very tall tree holding a sheet of cloth tautly between them and giving instructions to a third man at the top of the tree. Elsewhere, some men were gathering different kinds of leaves into big piles, and I saw still others collecting resins and saps from tree trunks. Now and then someone could be seen coming from the jungle's more distant areas holding cages with small wild animals and birds inside. With all these people fearlessly engrossed in their respective tasks, the jungle now appeared absolutely fascinating to me. Their concentration was also fascinating; it seemed as if

outside of their work they were oblivious to the presence of anyone else around them. But whenever the Snake Catcher passed one of them, the man would interrupt his work and resume it only after the Snake Catcher had moved on. They didn't look toward him, but when I passed by they smiled and shook their heads as if inquiring after me. They made signs to inform one another that I was there, then they looked at me and smiled. Several times I thought that I should smile back at them, but I continued to pass among them with the face and eyes of a dead man. This seemed to be quite appropriate and I rationalized that it was a consequence of my accompanying the Snake Catcher. Before long we had moved past these people.

We were now in the semi-dark areas of the jungle. Here, the Snake Catcher sat down on a thick root that jutted out of the ground and he signaled to me to sit down too. I did. He asked me, "Where were you coming from?"

I told him. With his thumbnail he kept scratching the bark of the tree whose root he was sitting on. I noticed that both of his thumbnails were unusually long and bluish. He kept gazing at the dark-green streaks that had begun to appear on the bark. He gazed at them for a long time. Then he rubbed his nail on his clothes to clean it off and asked me in a very soft voice, "What did you say your name was?"

I told him my name once more. The dust-colored scrapings from the bark had accumulated on the protruding root. He gathered them up and rolled them into a loose ball between his palms and then put the ball inside his clothing to save it. After that he asked the question I was now expecting: "Where were you headed?"

I remained silent. He said, "If you didn't set out with a specific destination in mind, then this hamlet is just as good as any, although snakes abound here."

"In the jungle?" I asked.

"In the hamlet too," he said. "Because the two are close together, or rather the people have made them one."

I tried to think. Meanwhile he said, "Nobody's trying to stop you. If you really want to move on ..."

"Let me think it over. I'll tell you later."

"No need to tell," he said very gently. Then his tone changed and a touch of melancholy appeared. "The scar from the wound on your foot is now completely gone. Soon you won't even remember ever having been bitten by a snake."

"I *will* remember," I said and repeated the sentence silently in my heart.

"Familiar words," he said in an unsteady voice, "I've heard them before."

After that he didn't say anything further for a long time. I thought perhaps he was waiting for me to say something, but I found myself at a loss to say anything at all. Then he himself spoke up, "At first I was having difficulty determining what kind of snake bit you. I was already very tired and, besides, there wasn't much time—this is the reason I resorted to the bezoar. Later I had to come out here in the jungle to look for it."

I sensed the presence of a familiar odor somewhere near. Sometime, long ago, I was definitely familiar with it. A kind of haze began to spread through my brain, but it was cleared up by the voice of the Snake Catcher. He was pulling out a bag from the folds of his clothing.

"This is the one that bit you," he said as he plunged his hand inside the bag and took out a writhing snake.

The snake had just started to coil itself around his hand when a cry was heard from somewhere in the distance, "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!" And several voices in our vicinity repeated that cry like an echo, "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

He stood up.

"They're calling," he said swinging his hand and throwing the snake into the distance. The snake twisted its body a few times in midair and then fell into a bush with a slight thump, causing a couple of birds to take wing.

I watched him going back taking brisk long strides, and he soon disappeared from my view.

The familiar scent wafted by again in a gentle wave and suddenly I realized that it was coming from the green scratch marks on the trunk. As I was being drawn toward those green streaks, I heard the sound of approaching feet. The Snake Catcher was standing near me. He bent forward a little and put his hand on my shoulder.

"As I mentioned, snakes abound here," he said. "But I'm here too," and then, walking even more quickly than before, he went back.

I was still feeling the pressure of his hand on my shoulder. It came to mind that the same familiar odor was also present on his palms, and this reminded me that the very same smell also emanated from the broken torso of the rider about whom it could not be decided whether he had held a scale or a sword in his hand.

I don't remember well now how I started to help the Snake Catcher in his work. When I occasionally took a stroll through the hamlet, the residents treated me graciously, but much of their conversation focused on the Snake Catcher. They had no idea what he did in his spare time; they also didn't know, but were quite eager to find out, what he talked about with me, because, outside of inquiring about the condition of victims of snakebites—and even that in the briefest of words—he never talked about anything more with them. So it didn't surprise me at all that these people displayed their curiosity about him to me, although they asked me less about him than they told me. The topic of these conversations invariably centered on when and how and whom he had saved from a snake's venom. They particularly pointed out to me the people—myself included—whom he had revived. In short, they told me about myself but they asked very little about me, not even my name. Rather, they themselves gave me a name in their local language which meant "Helper." Hearing this word repeated on several occasions it finally occurred to me that I did, in fact, help the Snake Catcher and perhaps I had been living in this hamlet longer than I realized.

I would go to the jungle with him and gather the materials for his medicinal concoctions. These included minerals, vegetation, animals—in fact, everything. Sometimes we collected different types of clays and stones, sometimes different varieties of fruits and flowers, and sometimes the barks, roots, fibers and resins of trees. Sometimes we went out for animals and birds, which I couldn't round up all by myself but which he could easily while I proceeded to catch them. On all these occasions he described to me the effects of each item in great detail. The effect always dealt exclusively with healing wounds, never with the treatment of snakebites. I was sure that he only used a few of these materials on the victims of snakebite, but which ones—that I could never figure out. He never revealed that to me either. The fact is, he never discussed the subject of snakes. But one day he suddenly started to talk about it.

That was on the hamlet's market-day. Buyers from outlying areas had come. The merchandise consisted of whatever the people from the hamlet had been able to gather from the jungle. I had just returned after browsing through the market quickly. No matter where I went, I heard the Snake Catcher being talked about. These out-of-town buyers were especially interested in hearing about him, though he always stayed away from the market and their desire to see the famous Snake Catcher of the hamlet, even if only for a fleeting moment, had remained unfulfilled until that

market-day. I had barely stepped inside when the cry rose from the direction of the market, "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

Before I knew it, the Snake Catcher was standing in front of me. He was agitated, and an excitement, a curiosity, such as I'd never seen before, was apparent on his face. His quick appearance following the cry was also something quite new to me. I started to clear a spot on the floor, but he stopped me. "No."

I looked at him. He said, "I have to go. A snake's been spotted somewhere."

I too then realized that this time the cry didn't have the quivering fear of death that always sent a shudder through my body. This situation was new to me and I was wondering whether he would ask me to accompany him. Just then the cry went up again, still about the same distance away as before, but more like a loud, collective cry, "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

I saw him dart off in the direction of the cry. I started out after him but he had soon outdistanced me and disappeared. The tumult was still increasing, but before I could reach the market it had subsided and eventually it faded away completely. As I walked further ahead I saw the dust in the market rising up so profusely that hardly anything could be seen there at all. I strained to hear the sounds, but silence, such as cannot be imagined on a market-day, had spread everywhere. I stopped short. I kept staring at the swirls of dust twisting and turning in the air. I was thinking of going back when I heard a very loud, solitary voice rise from the market, "Who didn't know that I only catch snakes?"

It was the same voice that I had heard rising near my head the day I was bitten by the snake, but that day it didn't have this quality of molten stones. And now it rang out even louder than before, "Who didn't know?"

Perhaps something was said in response. The Snake Catcher's solitary voice was heard again. "If it's a python, it's a python; if it's a snake, it's a snake."

Beyond the clouds of dust I saw his trembling image. His hands were spread wide and he said in a voice that betrayed no emotion, "This is not the land of pythons. I've left that far behind."

His image froze for a second and then trembled again. Suddenly he came very close to me. The skin of his face was taut and his eyes had become very large. But he didn't see me. Perhaps I wasn't even visible to him. He was walking very fast. I moved out of his way and when he passed by me, I felt a chill flowing from his body. Even after thinking a

long time I wasn't any wiser so I just stepped into the dust-enveloped market.

The market was in a state of turmoil. No customers could be seen. When I scanned the area I spotted them quite some distance away standing quietly in a group near their carts. The local people had gathered into small groups of their own and they were talking in whispers. The minute they saw me they darted toward me and started talking all at the same time. For me, everything they said at first added up to just this: the Snake Catcher was angry and could I think of a way to appease him. "Python" or "snake" didn't even once figure in what was said, although the foolishness of someone was mentioned over and over. After a while they became quieter waiting for a response from me. Perhaps my silence spoke for itself and I was invited to listen to the whole story. A man, famous throughout the hamlet for his cheerful disposition, was chosen for the job. Drawing on totally unnecessary details, he began telling, in a perfectly serious tone, how the market had been set up and the order in which the customers had made their appearance. In the middle of his narration someone suggested that the incident should be recounted in the presence of the customers. A couple of people rushed over to them and, after talking with them, came back with the suggestion that everyone should move to where they and their carts were stationed. And so, avoiding the piles of merchandise we went over to them. Now I looked at the customers from up close.

Their faces reflected the usual weariness that comes from an idle and uninteresting period waiting for something. These out-of-towners—dis-similar in their clothing and temperaments, but nonetheless similar in their circumstances—had perhaps adopted this air of disinterest by mutual agreement. They looked at me indifferently and paid absolutely no attention to the narrator, which, however, didn't affect his engrossment in the least. Almost as soon as he got there, he resumed: how a customer coming from some distant place had encountered a python along the way which had not quite swallowed its victim yet and was beginning to slow down in its effort to do so while people stood all around it. The customer somehow prevailed upon these people to load the reptile onto his cart, taking every precaution so that it wouldn't escape. When he arrived at the market and the subject of the Snake Catcher came up, he or one of his companions told the people there about the python. As a result, a veritable crowd immediately formed around his cart. Everyone

was eager to see the python. The customer who had suddenly become the focus of everyone's attention opened, just slightly, the part of the cart that held the python. Everyone now saw the python slide out in one swift motion, fully alert and active. Soon it was slithering about in the market. Some people thought it even attacked them. Chaos erupted everywhere. The residents of the hamlet were hell-bent on destroying the python, while the customers who had come to shop at the market wanted to recapture it alive. This led to some unpleasantness, in the middle of which somebody mentioned the Snake Catcher and the cry went up. Meanwhile, the escaped python had wandered into that section of the market where small animals and birds were sold. By the time the Snake Catcher arrived it had already grabbed one of the animals in its mouth and people were surrounding it. For a while nobody even noticed that the Snake Catcher had arrived. Finally they looked at him, only to find him a different man, a completely different man. Never before had anyone seen him in such an angry state. He paid absolutely no attention to the python and went away still quite angry.

This account was rather long-winded, abounding in the names of commodities and individuals. Whenever the narrator mentioned a certain product, he found it necessary to also point to its mound in the market indicating who it belonged to as well as who wanted to buy it. And whenever he mentioned the name of one of the hamlet's residents, he not only asked that individual to show himself to me, he also gave me a brief introduction to him. I recognized some of these individuals as snakebite victims. In any case, the narrative ended. Now several people started to talk at once again. All of them were afraid that the Snake Catcher would abandon the hamlet and they hoped I would talk him out of it. Each one feared that the Snake Catcher was particularly angry with him individually and took pains to point out that the suggestion to summon the Snake Catcher hadn't originated with him; some even claimed they had opposed the idea. The customers, however, were silent. But when I started to leave, a heavy hand grabbed onto my shoulder. I turned around to look. He was perhaps the oldest among the customers and he didn't see well. He drew me close to himself and said, "We've been duly informed that a python is a python. But do ask him this: those whom a snake has devoured alive, doesn't that snake count as a python for them?"

And then, straining his eyes, he stared at me for the longest time as though he expected me to answer.

"And don't forget to tell him that if he is indispensable for the hamlet, so are we," he was saying. "If it was ever necessary to decide which of

us is more indispensable," he hesitated, and it struck me that his voice wasn't consistent with his appearance at all.

"Should he so desire, you may also tell him my name," he said, letting go of my shoulder, but he didn't reveal his name to me.

As I trekked back, the residents of the hamlet accompanied me for some distance, but now they were talking among themselves, caught up in misgivings which eluded me. However, their conversation did reveal, but only vaguely, that the Snake Catcher didn't like the presence of the customers in the hamlet, nor they his. And yet they also definitely affirmed that neither the customers nor the Snake Catcher had actually expressed this displeasure openly.

I found the Snake Catcher sitting on the same mat that was used to cover the dead bodies of snake victims. When he saw me he moved over a bit to clear a place, and, after a slight hesitation, I also sat down on the same mat. He was rubbing his long, bluish thumbnails on his clothes, and he was silent. There was a faint rustling sound coming from the rubbing. After a while it seemed to me that the sound was coming from somewhere far away. Then it started to draw nearer, quickly gaining in intensity. Then it appeared to be coming from outside. It turned dark for a minute and I promptly got up. The sound grew progressively fainter and receded into the distance. I looked outside. The ground was wet and drops of water were falling from the leaves, but the sky was absolutely clear.

"Sit," he was saying. "This sort of rain does fall here occasionally."

I sat down.

"Where were you?"

I gave him a brief account of what had transpired at the market, but I skipped the conversation with the old customer and the thoughts expressed by the local residents afterward.

"They consider a python and a snake the same thing," he mumbled, as if complaining, "although they haven't seen either one. To them both are slithering creatures, one larger than the other. They know next to nothing about the difference in poisons." He looked at me and fell silent. My own silence didn't seem to be a proper response to his tone and I asked, "Doesn't the difference in poisons result from the difference in snakes?"

"A snake is one that has poison. The rest are merely colorful insects. Then again, a snake is a snake only as long as it can make use of its poison. That's why a dead snake is no longer a snake."

"But poisonous snakes come in different varieties ...?"

"It's poison that has varieties, not snakes."

"How about the snake ... the merely colorful insect, whose victim dies from fright ...?"

"For such a person it is a snake, though in reality ..." he stopped, resuming after a pause, "Why, you do have a way with words. I don't know why ... but this word 'variety' ... it applies to those who die from fright, not to those slithering creatures; and to those that slither this is the most poisonous variety of human. That's why you see me treat people of this variety the way I do."

I recalled the cries and the desperate ranting and raving of some victims brought to the Snake Catcher and I asked, "For the sake of those colorful insects?"

"For the sake of both ... but ..." he said quite amiably, "didn't you like what I said about the colorful insects? All right, just for your sake, I'll grant that there are two types of snakes: one from whose bite a man dies legitimately; and a second from whose bite a man dies illegitimately."

But this, in effect, amounted to two kinds of men, didn't it?—I thought, and perhaps he was also thinking the same thing, though neither of us said a word.

He remained silent for a long time. During this interval, he looked at his nails closely once, he ran his hand back and forth over the mat for a while, and then he said, "The place where I lived before I came here really had an overabundance of pythons. Because of my fascination with all things that kill, I would wander around observing pythons, always anxious to see one catch its prey. And I did see that sight many times, indeed, so many times that I began to understand the nature of the relationship a python has with its victim. I assume you know that every creature that hunts has a relationship with its prey."

I didn't know; all the same I shook my head yes.

"Like any hunter ... like any hunting animal, a python seeks out prey only when it's hungry. It lies in wait, coiled around a tree. Sometimes it waits in a high place, sometimes very close to the ground, and sometimes, disappointed in one place, it moves on to another, waiting, waiting. Finally, a victim chances by and the python appears as though it isn't aware of the approaching prey."

"Suddenly, however, it springs, and it can be seen coiling around the victim. The victim writhes too, aware, almost immediately, that he's facing death, and he struggles harder to break free of the coils. But they increase and tighten around him. It's a fierce but quiet battle that sometimes goes on for a very long time. Eventually the intensity subsides. The thought of facing death, which before augmented the victim's will to survive, now weakens it. When this point is reached the python begins to devour its prey. But its eyes don't shine with victory." He slowly closed his palms. "I've always looked closely into the eyes of both and have always found only a desolate stillness there, as if they're consciously avoiding each other. Behind that stillness their half-closed eyes sometimes show resignation, sometimes a peculiar embarrassment, and sometimes just weariness, as if they're merely fulfilling a responsibility, their hearts aren't in it. That's why sometimes—perhaps this is just a fancy on my part—I feel ..." He stopped. He reflected for a very long time, but he didn't finish.

"Why did you abandon the land of pythons?" I finally asked, but perhaps he didn't hear.

"Until his very last breath the victim struggles to break free from the python's coils, even though in the end the struggle is nothing more than merely carrying out the formality of living. It's a terribly revolting sight. But once caught by a python, the victim knows, from start to finish, that he's facing death, and why. He can feel the physical presence of the python until his last gasp, and the python can feel its victim's presence even long after that. For both of them it's a game played out in the open. And a game that's played out in the open ..." He stopped again and didn't finish. It seemed as if he had suddenly become aware of my presence, and he asked, "When the snake's poison was spreading through your body and you were nearing death, where was the snake itself at that time?"

"I don't know."

"It must have been somewhere quite far from you, and it's possible that it had meanwhile encountered something that took its mind off of you completely. You had perhaps seen it, so you were fleeing; but it's also possible that you hadn't seen it at all, and only thought that a small thorn had pricked your foot. At most you would have bent down and rubbed on the spot gently. Before long you would have forgotten that a thorn had ever pricked your foot. God knows how far you might have walked before the poison started spreading through your body, and you would have been at a loss to understand what was happening to you. It wouldn't

even have occurred to you that the prick you had felt on your foot sometime somewhere was actually the thing that was killing you. You wouldn't have known whose prey you had become, and your hunter would have been no wiser than you. Why, for that matter, it's not even necessary that there should be a hunter. It's entirely possible that your hunter had already perished before you. But for you what difference would it have made whether it was alive or dead, near or far, because a snake doesn't play its game out in the open. Only a python does."

I mentioned the remark made by the old customer that, for a small animal, weren't a snake and a python alike.

"Yes," he said, "market customers think up such questions all too frequently, although they know that a snake is not like a python where humans are concerned, and a python is not a snake for anyone. They can't even begin to understand what a tremendous difference there is between the two."

I was reflecting on the difference when he asked, "Have you seen a python before today?"

When he found out that I hadn't before, or even today, he shifted a bit and I felt somewhat uneasy. Once again our conversation was heading toward a question. I was hoping the subject of our conversation would change somehow. For a moment I considered asking him about the cloud that had rained suddenly and then drifted away, but he himself threw a question at me, "What did they tell you about the python?"

I had to tell him that I hadn't asked them about it at all. I sensed that his gaze was fixed on me. There was silence for quite awhile. Finally he said, "Well all right, if you don't want me to, I won't ask you anything about yourself."

Afterwards he talked for a long time about different snake poisons and their effects, but it seemed as if he was trying to refresh his own memory. Suddenly there was the sound of approaching feet and he gave a start.

Three strangers appeared.

One of them said, "We came here since you couldn't be found there."

The Snake Catcher stood up. "Oh, it's already so late in the evening!" he said with amazement.

The men kept looking over at me. Finally, one of them pointed at me and said, "In front of him?"

"No," he said. "Come." And making them go ahead of himself he ushered them into the inner area of the house.

They weren't residents of the hamlet, and they also definitely looked quite different from the customers I'd seen in the market. Still there was something about them, and it didn't take me long to conclude that they too were customers.

4

That very night, just before the crack of dawn, the cry went up and an unconscious man was brought in along with a dead snake. The people who accompanied him said that they had heard him scream but by the time they reached him he was already unconscious. They found the snake not far from him. They also said that the man had been bitten by a snake once before. They were discussing the details of the first episode when the Snake Catcher appeared in front of them.

"What happened?" he asked, bending over the unconscious man. He then examined the snake closely before leaning over the man one more time. He kept looking at the two by turns for quite some time. Finally, he withdrew to one side and said in a voice without any expression, "Take him away."

Perhaps this was an entirely unexpected situation for them. As they were consulting among themselves with their eyes, the Snake Catcher's somewhat loud voice was heard saying, "What did he tell you?"

I told him that the men had found him unconscious and that they had only heard him scream.

"He hasn't been bitten by a snake," he said, and left. The people who had brought the unconscious man had just started to say something when the man's condition took a turn for the worse and they rushed toward him.

Just then, off in the distance, the cry rose again: "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

The companions of the unconscious man picked him up and went out of the house. Shortly thereafter another group came in. It included a few people from the earlier group and it also brought an unconscious man, whose condition apparently didn't look good. I was given no details this time around. Instead, everyone remained silent, even when the Snake Catcher came and questioned them. Perhaps they were having difficulty deciding who should speak. But by now the Snake Catcher had already bent over the unconscious man. One of the group, who seemed very rest-

less, came forward and stood close to the Snake Catcher. "Snake-bite—wouldn't you say?" he asked, practically begging.

Looking at the dead snake stretched out on the mat the Snake Catcher shook his head affirmatively.

I noticed, for the first time, how a current of relief and joy washed over the entire group accompanying the snake's victim, even before the treatment had begun.

"Milk!" the Snake Catcher said, and some people dashed out. They had all guessed that the treatment would be done with the bezoar but their hope of watching the treatment was not satisfied because, after the milk had been brought in, the Snake Catcher had all of them step out.

The wound couldn't be found. The Snake Catcher himself made a wound on the victim's body. The bezoar even stuck to that. While I was dribbling milk over it, I heard him say, "I don't know what it is, perhaps no one does: is it something created by the ancients or by nature, like a stone or vegetation, or is it some kind of living thing?"

"Living thing?" I asked. At the same moment the bezoar tumbled down, unconscious.

"This unconsciousness," he said, "or perhaps temporary death—isn't it proof enough of its being a living thing? And then again, what proof is there that it isn't?"

He retrieved the bezoar from the milk pot and placed it on the wound.

"You'll be amazed to know," he said, "that I fear the snake more than anything."

I was amazed indeed. And I made it known that I was.

"But there are times when I fear the bezoar even more."

Just then the victim's body stirred and the Snake Catcher fixed his attention on him.

By the time the victim left, walking on his own feet, it had become sunny. Placing the bezoar between his palms and rubbing it slowly the Snake Catcher said, "It plays its game out in the open, but no one is able to understand it. Isn't that something to fear?"

"Perhaps," I said, "but if ..."

"And it's the killer of poison, which makes me absolutely sure that in some way or other it is itself lethal. But how? I have in my possession a thing that kills, but I don't know how it kills. That's why I fear it, and when fear is mixed with the thought that maybe this thing is alive ..."

I was feeling drowsy, but it was a strange kind of drowsiness. I had the feeling that I was becoming hollow and that if I fell asleep my body would simply disappear. I wanted him to go on talking so that I wouldn't fall asleep, but I was only able to hear one more sentence. "In exactly this same way, I also begin to fear myself sometimes."

Then I saw him dash toward me.

5

Up to now I haven't been able to figure out how much time I spent among those dim shadows. In the beginning I sensed nothing except the sounds of softly approaching feet. Later, along with those sounds, I could feel the sensation of hands touching me. Sometimes those hands fed me some liquid which immediately filled my nostrils with an odor resembling acrid smoke. I felt that there was a black curtain drawn in front of me all the time. Finally one day faint ripples began to appear on the curtain, gradually changing into murky shadows. At first these shadows were incomprehensible to me, but then they began to assume whatever form I wished, and it became something of a sport for me. Outside of these changing forms, which were entirely dependent on me for their existence, I nurtured absolutely no curiosity about anything else, and whatever came in contact with my senses seemed entirely natural to me, something that had been happening forever. Voices asked me questions, which didn't need to be understood to be answered. At times I even started answering when no question was asked and I supposed that I was, in this way, discharging myself of some major obligation. I was contented with my life in every way.

Once, though, I suddenly began feeling an aversion for my speech, and I fell silent in mid-sentence. Somebody asked me a question which I didn't understand. After that I mostly slept or dreamed. One of my dreams was that a snake had bitten me in a jungle in the midst of green vines. I was carried over to the Snake Catcher's and he was saying that I had not been bitten by a snake, but the people were imploring him, trying somehow to make him say that I had indeed been bitten by one. They moved forward toward him and drew back repeatedly, and their back and forth movements shook my body and interrupted my sleep.

The Snake Catcher was looking at me bent over. Finding me watching him, he retreated several steps, went to one side and stood there. I looked at him again and he came back over to me.

"It doesn't displease you to look at me—does it?" he asked.

I was lying on a pile of cushions. Some vessels, whose purpose I didn't understand, lay near me. There were large doors all around and each had several curtains of some exceedingly fine fabric hanging over it. The Snake Catcher pulled back the curtains of a door. The strong light that poured through the open door appeared very strange and unpleasant to me. But I didn't close my eyes. I was expecting to see something but didn't have a clue what it might be. Whatever was on the outside wasn't visible to me. The Snake Catcher drew the curtains together and I shut my eyes. I heard his voice. He was telling somebody, "Today I'll take him with me."

When my eyes opened next, the Snake Catcher was standing in front of me holding a light.

"Let's go," he said.

Several hands stood me up and I went out supported by those hands. Since the light was falling directly on my eyes, I was unable to see anyone. I was put on a seat in a carriage. When it moved, there was no one with me. Not even the light was with me. I drifted in and out of sleep the whole way. Finally the carriage stopped and I saw the Snake Catcher holding the light. He helped me get down. I could see his house up ahead.

"Try to walk on your own," he said. Taking slow steps I went through the door. Just then he said something and I turned around to look. The lights in the houses of the hamlet could be seen. The Snake Catcher had drawn near me. He no longer held the light in his hand and three murky shadows were getting on the carriage.

"Come in," I heard him say.

For several days I didn't step outside. Perhaps I didn't feel like it, or perhaps I imagined that the Snake Catcher didn't want me to. I had also dreamed up several vague explanations why he wanted it that way, but I don't remember what they were now. The fact is that, in the first place, during this time I saw very little of him. My memory was becoming keener now and I could recall everything in detail, though I had little success remembering things in the order they occurred. For instance, the incident of my being bitten by the snake seemed to me to have occurred after the Snake Catcher had grabbed the snake and tossed it away in the

jungle. Inevitably I turned my attention to the medicinal ingredients the Snake Catcher collected from the jungle. I noticed there hadn't been any increase in their volume since his last trip when I accompanied him. I picked up each and every substance, and everything he had told me about it started to surface in my memory. I also found the substance he had scraped from the bark of the tree which emitted its familiar odor. The Snake Catcher had mentioned several of its effects, but here my memory faltered. Try as hard as I might, I couldn't remember a single one of those effects; why, when I strained my memory harder, I even forgot that it was a scraping of tree bark. This recurred several times. Then it began to happen that the minute I saw the scraping, or even so much as thought of it, its odor wafted into my nose, making it well-nigh impossible for me to stay inside the house.

On one such occasion I heard the noise of children, or a sound somewhat like rain coming down somewhere far off. I went out and started to walk in the direction of the sound. Noticing greenish clumps shifting this way and that up ahead in the distance, I went near them and saw that they were large-leaved vines being dragged around by small children who looked very excited by this game. Some children would jump into the vines and get dragged along with them for some distance, thrashing their arms and legs about as though they were playing in water and leaving behind them trails of broken bits of leaves. When they saw me their excitement increased and they started to shout, "Snake Catcher! Snake Catcher!"

For a while I didn't hear their voices. I saw people rushing down the roads on their way from the jungle. Within minutes a crowd formed around the children. Then suddenly everything became very quiet and I heard the Snake Catcher's voice behind me, "You shouldn't remain out-of-doors too long."

After he was gone, the children tried to resume playing with the vines but their elders stopped them and started to drag them away.

Then I noticed that, for the first time ever, they had returned from the jungle empty-handed.

I continued sleeping well into the next day. I was awakened by the sound of soft footsteps. Two men from the hamlet were standing beside my bed near my head. One of them who was well known for his cheerful disposi-

tion asked me, in a serious tone of voice, how I was doing, and then he said, "You've changed a lot during this time, Helper. We all wanted to see you. We had the chance yesterday, but the cry ..." he suddenly became despondent. "But perhaps you had come out on account of the cry."

I told them that I had come out because of the noise of the children and it was they who had raised the cry when they saw me.

"If only you could tell him that ..." he became despondent once again. "How can it be, Helper, that children would not do what their elders do?"

His companion reminded him of something; hesitation began to show on his face. I said, "Yesterday when I saw you all returning empty-handed from the jungle ..."

"We knew it would sadden you," he said, his natural cheerfulness slowly returning. "Helper, we only want to see you." He pointed outside. "They've all gathered out there. We know you shouldn't stay out-of-doors for long."

"And besides, you've just woken up," his companion added.

I got out of bed. It was the time when the local residents went out to the jungle. I found them assembled on the road. They gazed at me in wistful silence for the longest time, until I couldn't hold back any longer.

"It's all very hazy in my mind," I said. "All the same, ask what you have to ..."

They drew close to me. Now they all started asking me questions. None of these questions indicated that they wanted me to answer it; the balance of their questions seemed not to even be directed toward me. Someone would ask a question, several others would reject it and ask questions of their own which were rejected in turn by still others. Pretty soon I guessed that their questions were actually directed toward one another and that they were having difficulty deciding what questions I could conceivably answer. Such weariness was etched on their faces and such despair oozed from their words that the thought that I was not one of them began to weigh heavily on me. Soon, though, I found myself inundated by questions that had somehow penetrated my hearing clearly. Was this the first time I was bitten by a snake? Had I been bitten two times or only the second time? Why did I choose to come to the hamlet via the jungle? Was I really sorry to see them return from the jungle empty-handed? Why then is the jungle being chopped down?

"Why then is the jungle being chopped down?" I repeated this last question.

"We had never thought about it," an old man said. "It has always provided sustenance for us, but now it is *we* who are chopping it down." He looked at his hands in despair.

"Are you chopping down the jungle?" I said.

"We have to do something, Helper. It may not be what we want, but others commission us to do it. And to tell you the truth, even now the jungle is sustaining our lives. But for how long?"

"This is a good hamlet, Helper," said another, even older, man. "Of course it has too many snakes. But then, it also has the Snake Catcher."

After that they turned toward the jungle. Only the old man remained, standing with his head bent low. I drew near him and put my hand on his shoulder. He lifted his head and looked at me with his gloomy eyes saying, "This hamlet used to be a good one, Helper."

Then he went to catch up with the rest of his companions.

"I would like to know," I said.

"I know you've been asked many questions," the Snake Catcher said. "But they themselves don't know whether or not you can answer those questions. Since you're a stranger they think you might know what they don't. It isn't a good thing to be a stranger, Helper." He used my name for the first time. "Or perhaps it is. And then again maybe not."

"I'd like to know," I repeated.

"You couldn't figure anything out from their questions?"

I only repeated to him the questions that I had heard clearly. He listened with his head bowed. After a while he lifted it. "Are you sure these questions were asked in that order?"

I was speechless. Actually, except for the last question about why the jungle was being chopped down, I didn't remember the order of the questions.

He looked at me intently. Several times his eyes were focused down on me and then raised up. Then he put his hand on mine and said in a very soft, low voice, "No? Don't try to remember; otherwise you'll be overwhelmed. What is first and what is last, forgetting that makes a huge difference, Helper. And this difference will correspond to the differences in the manner of forgetting."

"I'm having difficulty remembering the order of the questions."

"Try to forget it now. Be glad that you only encountered questions." He got up and began to pace. "Suppose the questions had also accompanied answers, some of which might have themselves been in the form of

questions, and you had been unable to determine which answer went with which question, and which question came after which answer or question, and which question followed it, and every time ..." he choked on his words.

Is he crying? I wondered and looked at him, but his eyes were dry and his voice had cleared.

"...and every time, when you tried to remember but weren't sure, you would have regretted remembering even as much as you did," he said, and it was quite apparent that he was trying to remember something but was unsure about it.

"When I said that I'd like to know," I explained, "I meant ..."

"And what surprised me the most was that you wanted to know. You've changed quite a bit during this time, Helper."

"I was thinking of the people of the hamlet."

"They are a fine people," he said, and then his eyes also became gloomy and he said the same thing, "This used to be a good hamlet, Helper."

He got up to go. I came and stood in front of him.

"Why is the jungle being chopped down?" I asked.

"Really, you've changed a lot," he said with a tinge of regret. "Even so, you're a stranger, and here, in this matter, it isn't a bad thing to be a stranger. Anyway, Helper, I myself wanted to tell you something. It's not that I want to inform you about things; that's not my job." He made a low, grunting sound, and seeing him in this condition, at the time, I was reminded of trapped animals.

"When I said that I'd like to know ..."

"Look, Helper," he signaled me to sit down as he did so himself and said, "you know, everyone has to do something or other, and whoever does something must unavoidably deal with buyers. Even if he has nothing to sell, he still has to. A buyer looks for profit and only watches out for his own gain. Right? But what's even worse, if he sees only his gain but doesn't see the other's loss, he begins to have doubts about his own gain. And there are many buyers like this who only measure their gain by the loss of the other. No ..." He stopped me even before I could open my mouth. "Don't say that it's not like that. It *is*. You perhaps doubt it. Sometimes I think about you. You don't have to deal with buyers not are you a buyer yourself ... Have you ever thought why you are like this?"

"I will now."

"Because you're a stranger. You were offended when I called you 'stranger,'—but the fact is: you are a stranger, pure and simple. And as I

said, this is not a bad thing, Helper. This is not something to take offense at."

"I wasn't offended," I said with perfect equanimity.

"Stranger," he mumbled. "This is why you felt the need to understand, even though you had been told that we have come into the midst of buyers."

"Didn't you have dealings with them before?"

"We did. But at that time the buyers used to come to us. Now that we've gone to them ..." His words were drowned in a grunt, and once again I thought of trapped animals.

Suddenly it seemed as if he'd heard something. He got up, grabbed my hand and led me out of the house. He scanned the area, as if he was trying to determine the direction. I strained my ears. Just then a quivering animal sound was heard some distance away. Still holding onto my hand he walked in that direction but stopped after just a few steps. His eyes were riveted in the direction of the sound. It seemed as if he had become oblivious of my presence, but he said, "Actually, what I wanted to tell you, Helper, was that every buyer goes to great lengths to prevent people from understanding his operations. And he considers this necessary for his own gain as well as for the other's loss. So now don't ever say that you want to understand, because I myself don't understand." After that he started to move briskly in the direction of the sound.

We didn't have to go far. Coming to a mound of earth he halted. He let go of my hand and went halfway around it. He was now facing me from the other side. He gestured for me to back away and I had just barely done so when a snake quickly slithered out from behind. I hadn't yet noticed it when the Snake Catcher thrust himself between me and the snake. I had the feeling that he had gotten there by going tight through the heap. The snake reared up but the Snake Catcher again stood in his way. The snake twisted to one side, the Snake Catcher again placed himself in its way. The snake's slithering track and the Catcher's footprints were both being formed on the soft, dry earth without a sound. Once again the snake turned around. But the Snake Catcher was again in front of him. There was a brief pause and then the snake lifted its head and spread out its hood. Turning to one side the Snake Catcher moved forward. The snake gyrated, pointing its hood toward him. The Snake Catcher spun lightly and advanced toward it. The snake's hood was again facing him. But now the Snake Catcher continued to move straight toward him. The snake's hood was swinging right and left and its tail was slowly flapping on the ground. The Snake Catcher had reached the snake.

Suddenly one of his knees touched the ground, his hand moved forward, a bit of dust flew up, and the snake could be seen wrapped around his arm all the way up to his shoulder. Its deflated hood was held tightly in the Snake Catcher's fist.

Holding the snake this way he came over to me.

"How does it look?" he asked.

I discerned an awesome beauty in both of them; although, compared to the Snake Catcher, the snake looked like something brought into existence just recently.

"It hasn't bitten you—has it?" I asked, realizing myself how absurd my question was.

The Snake Catcher pressed against the snake's hood with his thumb and its mouth popped open. He lifted it up a bit higher to look. He was saying something to it under his breath which I couldn't hear clearly, but I did guess from it that the snake was a female.

"All the poison ever seen," he said, staring into the snake's eyes. Then he turned toward me. "Everyone has to do some work or other, Helper, and my work is with poisons."

Lately more snakes had started to appear in the hamlet. At least once a day a call went up. By now, I too had begun to understand the differences in this call so I didn't have to make any preparations when I heard it. The Snake Catcher would emerge from the inner part of the house and go out. He would return shortly and I would try not to look at him. He himself paid no attention to me. Sometimes he wasn't at home when the cry was raised and he could be seen rushing from the direction of the jungle or from some other direction. But after he had caught the snake he made straight for home. He usually stayed inside the house, or perhaps his house had another door that led to the outside. At any rate, other than catching an occasional glimpse of him, I hadn't had a conversation with him since the day he had caught the snake in my presence.

One day, though, I noticed that he came near me again and again. He would stare at me for some time and then go back in. Once, while this was going on, a cry was even raised, and when he returned from outside he lingered near me for a long time. Without looking at him, I just waited for him to speak, but he didn't say a word. A sound, like someone repeatedly opening and closing his palm, came from his hand periodically. One time I even thought that he was saying something, but it was barely audible. Finally, I looked toward him. As I had suspected, he was

looking at me, but his face betrayed nothing. The snake wrapped around his arm was alternately tightening and loosening its coils. I started to say something, but checked myself. With his hand bent over, the Snake Catcher was now gazing at the snake. He turned around and came back, tripping slightly along the way.

By evening another cry went up. I had fallen asleep and was awakened by the cry. There was a silence everywhere. I stayed awake for some time and then, thinking that the cry had occurred in my dream, I was about to go back to sleep when I heard footsteps outside the house. Shortly afterward a small crowd of people came inside. I sat up startled. A dead snake was dangling from a stick which the man at the front of the crowd was holding in his hand. I tried hard but couldn't remember whether this time the cry had contained the quivering fear of death or not. I cleared a space on the ground and spread the thin mat over it. The crowd looked at me in silence. Then the man at the front moved forward. He tossed the snake, along with the stick, onto the mat and turned toward me saying, "We had to kill it."

After that they all went away in complete silence. The snake lay on the mat haphazardly.

I noticed a slight movement in it, despite the fact that its hood was badly crushed. The snake was exactly the same kind I had seen the Snake Catcher capture in my presence.

After lying awake for quite a while I went back to sleep.

Halfway through the night I woke up. I felt the sensation of two cold fingers on my neck. I sat up in bed. The Snake Catcher was standing in front of me. Then he sat down nearby. As before he remained silent.

"I didn't hear the cry," I said.

"There wasn't a cry," he said.

I looked around. The dead snake lay on the mat as haphazardly as before, though the direction of its hood had changed slightly. I looked toward the Snake Catcher.

"This time I am informing you, Helper," his cold hand clutched mine. "The bezoar has disappeared."

"God knows," he said.

He remained absolutely speechless for quite a while. I got out of bed and stood up. "I'll look for it."

He motioned for me to sit down, and placing his hand on my shoulder he said to me very gently, "Such things don't disappear in order to be found again."

"Even so, perhaps . . ."

"It won't help to worry," he said. "It's a loss, surely; but worrying won't help."

He said it as though it was I, not he, who had sustained the loss and he was trying to console me. His manner was so genuine that for a while I really began to think of myself as deserving his sympathy. Soon, however, I regained my ability to consider the reality of it.

"The bezoar was only needed occasionally," I said.

"Yes, occasionally," he said. "It was the last resort, and it never failed."

"But you have many other remedies; you rarely made use of the bezoar."

"I understand, Helper," he said, "but you don't. It was the last remedy, and it never failed because it could take care of every poison. Of course there's no shortage of remedies, but it, and it alone, could neutralize certain poisons. I will have to fear those poisons from now on, in fact, I'll have to fear all poisons because it was the last alternative as an antidote for every poison."

But he didn't look frightened, rather, at the time, I thought his peaceful face appeared to be something one ought to fear.

"I'm not afraid, Helper," he said in a low voice. "But since its disappearance I'm seeing all this."

Afterwards a slight stupor came over him. Certainly he was seeing something at that moment. I extended my hand toward him. His half-opened eyes were riveted on me. My hand stopped midway and I began to see in his eyes everything that he, perhaps, was himself seeing: I see the Snake Catcher arrive at a place where a snake has been spotted. Many people are gathered together there. They make way for him the moment they see him, but the snake, instead of fleeing at his sight, coils up and spreads out its hood. The Snake Catcher moves toward it, slowly, cautiously. Suddenly the snake snaps, bites him, and flees. The people kill it and a crowd forms around the Snake Catcher. Next I see a crowd entering the house clamoring loudly. The condition of the unconscious man with them appears critical. Everyone looks terribly worried. The Snake

Catcher comes forward. He looks at the victim and then stands there silently. The victim's condition grows progressively worse. The people continue looking at the Snake Catcher and then they start beseeching him; they only want him to say that it was, indeed, a snake that bit the man. But the Snake Catcher continues standing silently until the victim dies. The people pick the man up and go out, and the sound of weeping can be heard from outside. Just then another crowd files in. But as soon as they see the Snake Catcher they retreat quickly, move forward again, and then draw back again. Everyone's gaze is fixed on the Snake Catcher. There is only a raging silence in his half-open eyes and he is looking straight ahead. Then he began to slump over.

I tried to raise him up, but he did it himself and then he sat with his eyes opened fully.

"As it is, the hamlet was dying out on its own anyway, Helper," he said. "This is yet another factor in its demise. I came here from the land of pythons and started to work with poisons." He remained silent for quite a while with his eyes fixed on the dead snake.

Shortly before daybreak he stood up. I tried to give him some support but he shrank back a little. Twice he repeated the name of my city and looked at me. Then he drew near me and said, "Feel like going back home?"

I didn't reply. He turned around to leave, but after taking a few steps he came back. From the mat he picked up the stick that had held the dead snake and peered at it in silence for a long time. Then he said, "Don't tell anybody, Helper, but I'm certain that I've forgotten all the cures for treating snakebites."

When I looked up, he was already gone.

I stayed awake watching the sun rise and its rays grow stronger. I heard the sounds of the hamlet coming to life and of people setting out for the jungle. But all this time my ears were trained on the sounds that were coming from the inner part of the house. These were faint and of different kinds: of picking up something and putting it down, of parting, of dirt falling on dirt, of pushing something carefully from one place to another, and also a sound that was intermittent but persistent and incredibly soft but with a brutal force lurking behind it. I couldn't figure it out at all. But I didn't want to hear it now. I was wondering what I should do if it continued. Just then it stopped. So far I hadn't heard the Snake Catcher's voice and I was waiting for it. But it was absolutely quiet

inside the house. I waited for a long time; the silence didn't let up. I felt as if the Snake Catcher's voice was some heady intoxication which I needed desperately, and I waited for this feeling to subside.

After waiting an appropriate amount of time I stepped into the inner part of the house.

Up until then I hadn't seen this part of the house. Here I found an assortment of bags, baskets, and objects resembling cages hanging from the walls or stored on high wooden shelves. There was also an assortment of small containers in different shapes, whose purpose escaped me, and, separate from them, lay a collection of small and large milk vessels. Several sticks, bent in a particular way, stood in a corner, and an empty bed lay near them. Some of the ingredients for medicines, most of which were stored in the section of the house where I lived, were lying in disorder under a shelf. I immediately returned to my living quarters and picked up, from the ingredients stored there, the ball of tree bark that emitted the familiar odor. As I was sniffing the ball, my gaze fell on the thin mat that was spread out on the ground. The dead snake was still lying there and had started to decompose. I didn't touch either the mat or the snake. Instead, I picked up the other mat which stood rolled up in the corner. Throughout this whole time the feeling that I was rendering great assistance to the Snake Catcher overwhelmed me.

I went into the interior of the house a second time and glanced again at the objects I had noticed on my first visit. I hadn't missed a single item. Now I began to look more closely at objects I had seen on earlier occasions.

On the floor snakes were scattered everywhere. They didn't move even though a few small animals frisked about in their midst. Whenever the animals brushed past a snake, it stirred slightly. The snakes were of different sizes, and some of them were really very beautiful. Here and there a snake had turned over and the neatly drawn lines on its white or yellowish belly were clearly visible. Each lay in its place in such a way that there could be no doubt that it was dead.

The hood on every one of the snakes was badly crushed, and none of them had any eyes left, though the mouths on some did seem to be open. The rest of their bodies were completely unscathed, except for a few whose tails also appeared to have been flattened. Had their eyes survived, I wondered, what kind of expression would they have shown? I immediately felt very bad about thinking such a thing and now I directed my

attention to the place I had looked almost as soon as I had entered the inner part of the house. I moved toward it, stepping in the empty spaces between the snakes.

The Snake Catcher was lying on the floor near the bed. One of his hands was stretched out in front of him and the other was grabbing onto the bed's cushion in such a way that half of it had slid down. I gently restored it to its earlier condition and the Snake Catcher's hand came to rest on the floor.

His face was under his outstretched hand so I couldn't see it. I started to say something but stopped. I was still holding the rolled up mat in my hand. I unrolled it and threw it over his body. Then I returned to my part of the house.

Seeing the snake lying alone on the thin mat, it occurred to me how unusual it was that no cry had gone up that day. At the time, I couldn't even remember when I had heard the last cry, although I could remember each of the earlier ones complete with its particular details. I continued thinking until a thick darkness spread all around, and I stepped out into that darkness.

I came upon traces of human habitation for some distance. Finally, the hamlet was left far behind. □

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*

Resting Place*

All my past life is mine no more;
The flying hours are gone,
Like transitory dreams given o'er,
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone.

—JOHN WILMOT, Earl of Rochester
from "Love and Life"

Zamāna guzīd, tū bāngard sū? khāna'-e kbkh
(Time has turned; you too turn back [to
your] home)

—MIRZA GADA 'ALI GADA
from the elegy "*Isht-e shāna-
jigar nē pas az namān-e 'ibād*"

I'M EXHAUSTED NOW, or rather, I now think that I had already become tired a long time ago, perhaps after I had been assured that I had no need go elsewhere and that I was to stay in this house from that day onward. I do recall vividly though that I felt full of energy when I first set foot in this place.

I

The house's façade had caught my attention. When I stopped to look at it, my glance fell on the garden in front and I walked in through the gate.

*From the author's first collection, *Stoipā* (Lucknow: Nusrat Publishers, 1984), pp. 209–32.

I proceeded toward the façade looking at the garden over a hedge of brambles. A desire came over me to go into the garden and examine each and every patch at length, but just then somebody asked me, "Who are you looking for?"

I was standing in front of a large room that formed part of the façade and the person sitting inside the room was looking at me intently. From his posture and expression it didn't take long for me to conclude that he was the owner, so when he asked me a second time, "Who are you looking for?" I replied, "You."

"Where are you coming from?"

"I've been wandering around."

"Come on in," he said, but then he himself came out.

"I was passing by," I said, "and saw this garden. I thought I might tell you. Let it be."

"Whatever for?"

"Everything in it is wild, some things are really very useful and not easily found. Please don't have it torn up."

"Yes," he said, looking at me with interest, "I thought so too: it has certain things that are useful and even rare. But I don't know anything about them."

"It's no easy job to lay out such a garden."

"It hasn't been laid out, just left to grow on its own," he said, then, hesitating a moment, he added, "Come, have a look from the inside."

We went down the two stone steps and came into the garden. I wandered around for a long time looking at the trees, vines and shrubs that grew haphazardly. The owner was walking behind me quietly. Whenever I began to explain something about a leaf, a tree trunk or a root by placing my hand on it, he quickly came up near to me and then fell back behind me again once I had moved on. If anyone saw us then, they would have perhaps taken me for the owner and him for the guest; actually I had started to think of myself as the owner, repeatedly deluded into thinking that I had a guest with me who was being shown around the garden for the first time.

Now we were in a dense arbor.

"You seem to know quite a lot about these things," he said.

"Not about all of them," I said, "but I do recognize them."

"You do?" he said, a little surprised. "So then ..."

"Each one has some kind of effect," I said. "I know the effect of certain ones, but not others; nonetheless I do recognize them all."

"Then tell me about this one," he said, lowering a branch that had long, thin leaves.

I told him the name of the tree and added, "But I can't tell you what its effect is."

Thereafter we started back toward the outer room. Going up the stone steps he turned around toward me and said, "You look quite tired."

"I've been wandering around," I replied.

We came to the door of the room in silence.

I saw that most of the seats in the room were occupied. I stopped at the door. The owner went in and took the same seat he had been sitting in earlier. In our encounter so far he had seemed like a rather serious and somewhat melancholy person, but among these people he appeared to be quite cheerful and carefree. Without paying much attention to the clothing or conversation of those present, I had surmised that most were guests but some were members of this household.

They were talking about the curios that decorated the room. The owner had apparently forgotten that I was there, but when I turned around to leave I heard his voice rise behind me: "Don't go yet," he said, standing near me. "Let me finish talking to the guests."

Turning towards the door he stopped short and said with a smile, "You, too, are a guest, in a manner of speaking, but it's possible ... All right, I'll send for you shortly." Then he went back inside.

I moved and stood a slight distance from the door. I could see a part of the garden from my vantage. The branches of the small trees that grew side by side in a row in this section seemed to be almost fused into one another, and a broad-leaved vine propped up against one of these trees had risen a bit higher, hanging over it and out past the hedge. I recognized all of them, one by one, but didn't know, or couldn't remember, what effect each had.

Finally I sensed that all the guests had left and only members of the household remained in the outer room. After a long conversation one of them got up. He came out and asked me to follow him.

There were four or five people, and each was looking at me with great interest. I remained silent as I stood before their eyes. Finally, the person who had come out for me asked, "Where all have you been?"

I told him a little.

"What all have you been doing?"

I told him a little about that too.

After that they talked among themselves secretly and I occupied myself by glancing at the curios. Then they broke into a loud laugh over

something and the owner turned toward me. "We want to keep you with them," he pointed at the curios, "but the trouble is you're alive."

"These are all priceless objects," I said, "though each one has something missing."

"Even so, should you care to rest here for a few days," he said, ignoring my comment, "space could be found for you too."

I had not heard the exchange that took place among them; still it occurred to me that for some reason they wanted to populate an unoccupied portion of the house. And a desire to look at this unoccupied part came over me, so I blurted out that I was ready to rest there for a few days.

"Come back tomorrow about this time," the owner said, and I left.

I found the owner standing near the stone steps leading into the garden. Perhaps he was waiting for me.

"Come," he said, and led me toward the side-door of the house. There was an enclosed area straight across from the door. It was scattered all over with tiny yellow leaves. I looked up: the leaves of the ancient tree that overshadowed the better part of the area were coming down steadily. I ran my hand over the tree's trunk and the owner, brushing leaves off of his head and shoulders, pointed and said, "Over there."

I could see a portico up ahead. I entered it behind the owner. Most of its dilapidated roof had tilted slightly downward, the mortar having crumbled long ago. The walls, however, were sturdy. A small door could be seen in the wall on the left. The door looked as though it hadn't been opened for quite a long time. Its wood had lost its strength. I gently pushed on one of its panels, but it refused to budge.

"This was once an attached storeroom," the owner said, "but its roof has caved in. It's filled with rubble. So now there's just this portico."

"Its roof too ..."

"No," he said, "it's been like this from the beginning."

"But the door ..."

"The rubble has closed it off from inside," he said. "If you think you could live in this portico ..."

"I imagine I can," I said.

"You'll face three problems," he said. "A pack of dogs lives on the other side of the wall. Sometimes when they start barking they keep it up all night. This will disturb your sleep."

"I sleep little as it is," I said, "and when I do, I doubt that I can be woken up by the barking."

"And when it rains, water sprays come in here."

"But surely there must be some part or other where the spray doesn't reach."

"There is," he said, "but you'll have to get up repeatedly. Sometimes it starts to rain all of a sudden; then it'll bother you more."

"It won't bother me," I said.

"This isn't a good place," he said in a tone at once a little melancholy and a little apologetic. "I had wanted you to stay here and rest."

"I won't have any problem, really."

"And yes, the third problem," he remembered and pointed toward the floor. "Sometimes slither-marks are seen here. I suspect the storeroom has ..." he stopped and shuddered slightly. I looked at the floor. It had obviously been swept clean just recently.

"A snake doesn't just bite someone on its own," I said. "Then again, not all snakes are poisonous."

"So you're sure you can rest here?"

"I imagine I can," I said, "but if that would inconvenience others..."

"People only rarely come into this section," he said. "Nobody will be inconvenienced, in fact nobody will even notice that you're here."

2

People rarely came into this part of the house, just as the owner had said, although now and then some sulking child would wander into the compound, followed shortly afterward by an adult who would emerge from the side-door and, after consoling the child, take him back inside the house. If a grown-up took longer in coming, I tried to amuse the child, but the children of this house weren't comfortable with me.

One day a child came out of the side-door crying and sat down under the tree for a long time. Having failed in my attempt to amuse him, I waited for an adult to show up. But perhaps the house was going through some sort of commotion that day. The child had meanwhile stopped crying and started throwing clumps of dirt at the branches of the tree.

"Why do you bother the tree?" I asked him. But he had already become oblivious to me. I also became oblivious to him. But when he suddenly started to scream, I looked at him. Blood was flowing down his forehead. I came out of the porrigo and picked him up in my lap. The

wound was deep and the bleeding just wouldn't stop. Pressing down hard on the wound with my hand, I started off toward the garden with the child in my arms. Near the steps I heard a voice behind me, "What happened?" The owner had emerged from the outer room.

"What happened to him?" he asked, looking at the child with concern. I told him what had happened which only increased his concern.

"There's something wrong with his blood," he informed me. "His wounds become infected very quickly."

"This one won't," I said, descending into the garden.

The owner followed me. I put the boy down and sat him on the ground. He had calmed down now and was looking back and forth fearfully at me and the owner.

"He was injured at the very same spot once before," the owner said, "and nearly died."

Meanwhile I'd spotted the leaves I was looking for. I squeezed them, letting the juice drip onto the child's wound, and then covered the wound with the crushed pulp.

"Let this sit the whole night," I said. "I'll look at him again in the morning."

"Will this be enough?" the owner asked me skeptically.

"I'll look at him again in the morning," I repeated. The owner picked up the boy and went inside.

The child's wound had nearly healed by morning.

That's how I got started treating the wounds of the people who lived in this house. Before long they started sending even outsiders to me for treatment. Most of the wounds of the outsiders were very old, but all of them were treatable from the resources in the garden, although this sometimes required the use of fire and cooking vessels. On such occasions the owner had the vessels sent over to me from the house. Sometimes he also accompanied these things and watched me for a long time busy at my work.

One day as he was watching I put a brand new vessel on the fire and, when I tossed some roots into it, the inside of the vessel turned black. I told the owner, "Certain items ruin the vessels; this distracts me from my work."

"But whatever you prepare is far more valuable than the vessels."

"Even so," I said, "new vessels hamper my work. If you've got some old ones lying around ..."

"I suppose that can be arranged," he said appearing to be thinking something, then got up and went back in.

Shortly thereafter the very boy who had injured his forehead came and left several odd-looking vessels near me. Some had their handles broken and some had their lids missing; still they were all quite sufficient for my purpose. As I was about to put one of them on the fire, my hand stopped and I pulled the vessel back up. I gathered up the whole lot and brought them over to the outer room.

The owner sat there in his usual chair, his head bent over. He lifted it when he heard my footsteps. I set the vessels on the floor near his feet and looked around at the curios. The gaping spaces between them gave the room a somewhat strange and unfinished appearance. Meanwhile the owner was looking intently at me.

"Why did you remove these?" I asked. He looked at me even more intently. I realized that my tone sounded demanding, but before I had had time to change it, he asked, "You're not pleased that I removed them?"

"They were here for a long time ... perhaps even from the very beginning," I said. "Your room doesn't look right without them."

He remained quiet for a while, then a faint smile appeared on his lips. "When you first came here," he began, "I mentioned that we wanted to keep you close beside them."

"I remember," I said, "but the problem was that I was alive."

"And still are," he said as his smile brightened. Then he suddenly turned very grave. "That's the reason you can't reside with them. But at least they can reside with you. Can they not?"

"They can," I said slowly, "because they are not alive."

"They are not alive," he repeated my last words like an echo.

"But without them this room ..."

"I'll rearrange things," he said, "so the absence of those others isn't felt."

He stood up from the chair and quickly started to move the curios around. Then he stopped, turned toward me and said, "Although their absence makes your presence felt."

He turned back toward the curios. I picked up the vessels and returned to the portico.

Those vessels were made of old metal alloys. The effectiveness of whatever I prepared in them was increased many times over.

From then on one of these vessels was nearly always on the fire and I would feel compelled to make several trips to the garden every day. I went there even when it wasn't necessary to do so, just to stroll around among the vines and shrubs. Sometimes I even rested there, until I began to feel that my true place of rest was the garden, not the portico. Though I still spent most of my time in the portico. From here I could see clearly the changing conditions of the small-leaved tree.

Sometimes its branches became heavy with leaves, spreading a cool shade beneath it. Sometimes its leaves turned yellow and scattered all over the compound. Seeing sunshine under its bare branches one felt that the tree had withered away. But then new sprouts appeared on those branches, and sometimes the entire tree turned red with flowers even before the leaves had appeared. Slowly the flowers disappeared, replaced by green leaves that covered the tree.

One day I was looking at the naked branches of the tree imagining where new shoots might appear first. It seemed to me that light green dots had started to appear here and there on certain branches of the tree even as I was looking at it. When I came out of the portico and approached the tree to give those tiny green dots a closer look, I heard something like a noise coming from the house. Several people rushed out of the side-door and ran toward the main entrance. Then some people came back and went in again through the same side-door. That day, for the first time, I became curious about the goings-on inside the house, but I just stood quietly between the portico and the tree watching people as they filed in and out through the side-door. At first everyone was silent, later they started to talk among themselves. Several times their eyes fell on me but nobody told me anything. The commotion inside the house was rising steadily. Finally I stopped someone who had just walked out of the side-door. He hastily told me the reason for the commotion. The owner had died while he was still sitting in his chair in the outer room.

I sat down under the tree leaning against the trunk. I remembered that I had seen him just that morning. He had walked over to me from the outer room as I was going down the garden steps. Standing there, he had queried me for a long time about different kinds of wounds and their treatments. Then I had gone down into the garden. When I was returning with an assortment of barks and leaves, I again found him standing near the steps. He asked me about the effects of the leaves and barks I had, expressing, with feigned seriousness, his desire to be wounded some-

time and to be treated by me. His last words rang out in my ears, "Provided," he had said, laughing, "the wound is one I would like."

God knows what sort of wound he had wished for himself? I wondered, and I felt a burning sensation in my nostrils. I looked up in front of me. The portico was filled with smoke, but I stayed under the tree. I knew that whatever was boiling in the old, uncovered cooking-pot in the portico must have boiled over and put out the fire.

4

I didn't venture out of the portico for many days. Meanwhile calm had returned to the house and sulking children had again started to wander into the compound. Now they sometimes even talked to me a bit. It's through them that I guessed that the man who had come to usher me back into the outer room the very first day was now the owner.

One day the new owner sent a boy to get me and bring me to the outer room, but when I got there I found that the door was fastened from the inside. I left. A few days later he sent for me again, and again I found the door closed. This happened several times. Finally one day as I was going away I stopped and tapped gently on the door. It opened. The new owner was standing across from me.

"Come," he said, sitting down in the previous owner's chair.

"I came several times before," I said, stepping into the room, "but the door ..."

"Yes," he said, "I keep it closed."

I took a sweeping glance around the room. The former owner's portrait hung on the wall straight across from me and the gaps the vessels had left between the curios were still there. I went over near the portrait and started looking at it. "He always watched over us with great care," the present owner said. Then he talked about the deceased for quite some time while I looked at the portrait. Now and then my eyes came to rest on a space left vacant by a vessel.

Finally I said, "He watched over me with great care too."

"That's why I've called you here," he said. "He hoped that you wouldn't go anywhere else," he paused, and then added, "and I hope that too."

After a long silence I said, "I won't," and turned around to leave.

"But he wanted you to rest here," I heard him say. "You really must rest."

I sensed something in his voice, so I stopped at the door.

"I'm not in any difficulty here," I replied.

While I continued standing at the door he started to say something several times but hesitated. Finally he got out of his chair and came over to me.

"This disorderly garden doesn't go at all well with this house," he said, faltering. Everyone had wanted it to be freshly laid out. He did too," he pointed at the portrait, "but ..." he hesitated, and said after a pause, "the fact is, it doesn't look like a garden at all."

"The fact is, it's not a garden at all," I said softly.

After that I remained speechless for quite some time and so did he. Finally, he cleared his throat and said, "He cared for you a lot."

"If you would leave the door open for a bit ..." I said, going out the door.

I went to the portico, gathered the vessels and hauled them back to the outer room. He was sitting in his chair.

"But he had given these to you," he said, looking at me intently.

"Empty spaces don't look pleasing," I said, returning the vessels to their places. He stared at me silently, then, when I'd finished my work and turned toward the door, he said, "You really must rest now and, as was his wish," he again pointed at the portrait, "you must stay on here."

5

I rest now. But I've allowed my curiosity to get the better of me. I want to know more and more about the things that transpire in this house. At first, the older people in the house answered my questions in great detail, then they may have begun to suspect that after asking a question I didn't really pay attention to their answer, or that I forgot the answer the minute I heard it. Later, they became convinced that I forgot my own question before they had even answered it. So now it doesn't surprise me that they don't like me asking them anything, and once one of them even blurted out, "You're afflicted with talking."

Children are no longer seen in the compound. Only one boy wanders in now and then. I know he's the one who will be the next owner of this house. He's very at ease with me, but whenever I ask him something he answers it in such a way that, were I to reflect on it, my mind would become completely muddled, but I don't reflect on it, although he thinks that I do. He's the one who told me about the plan for the new garden,

which I couldn't understand. Nevertheless I kept asking him about each and every corner of it, always forgetting what I had just asked. Finally he got fed up and always said the same thing, "Why don't you come along and have a look at it yourself?" and he would go back inside the house without waiting for my answer.

People continue to come and go in this house and this boy keeps me informed about it. But he purposely only gives me incomplete information so that I will continue to ask him question after question, and he can continue to give me incomplete answers.

One day he ran over to me and said, "Your guest has arrived."

"My guest?"

"Now this portico will be taken away from you."

"Will the guest take it away?"

"No, the patient, not the guest."

"A patient? What illness does he have?"

The boy pressed his lips with his finger waving his hand back and forth as if saying no, and waited for my next question. But I didn't ask him anything. He looked at me for a while feigning fear, and then suddenly said in a tone filled with the same mock fear, "Run! He's coming," and took off, disappearing behind the side-door.

I saw that a man had, in fact, entered the compound and had already walked up as far as the tree, with the owner and some other members of the household following behind. They stopped and stood under the tree. The owner was explaining something to the man. Then, taking slow steps, all of them came towards the portico. The guest's eyes were scanning the ground, as if he was searching for something. He was moving with deliberate slowness, but he didn't appear sick at all. He stopped a short distance away from me. Even now he was looking at the ground with half-closed eyes. The owner drew near him and said, "Just this portico." The man opened his eyes wide, lifted his head and twisted his neck giving just one glance at the compound, the tree, the side-door, the portico and me, and then he turned around to leave. It seemed to me that everything he had glanced at disappeared into his eyes and then came back out within the space of a single second.

Now they were entering the side-door. His eyes hadn't tarried on my face at all; still I was feeling as if I had just walked straight out of some maze.

I was bound to be curious about the patient. The boy visited me now and then and brought up the subject on his own, but since I knew he would never give a straight answer to any of my questions, I asked him about other things instead. Finally he stopped mentioning the patient altogether. But this only increased my dilemma further until one day I myself asked him, "How is your patient faring?"

"Why don't you ask the girl who comes to look after him," he said. "She comes here in this area too."

"Here?"

"She just sits for a long time under the tree," he said. "Perhaps you don't see well these days."

It occurred to me that on certain days I had, indeed, seen a girl under the tree, but I had thought of her as a guest.

"So she's his nurse?"

"No, she's *your* nurse," he said feeling bored, and he got up and went back into the house.

That same day, when the girl arrived and sat down under the tree, I came out of the portico. She saw me and greeted me. I approached her. She quickly stood up and I hurled one question after another at her about the sick man. However, I couldn't get much information out of her. She knew very little herself, but she did tell me as much as she knew.

What I found out from her was just this: for generations the relations between the families of the people who lived in this house and the family of the sick man had been very close. He had gone away somewhere. When the people of this house found him, none of his family except this girl remained alive. He didn't tell anyone where he had been, but he was willing to live in this house now.

"And what ailment does he have?" I inquired.

"He doesn't talk," the girl replied.

"Something wrong with his throat?"

"No, he's chosen on his own to give up talking."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you ask him?"

"What's the point? He's given up talking, hasn't he?"

I realized that my question was absurd.

After that, whenever she came into the compound, I would come out of the portico. She would greet me and I would spend a long time telling

her all kinds of interesting stories. I had taken it upon myself to amuse her. Sometimes I also asked her about the sick man, invariably adding at the end, "I want to meet him at least once."

One day she told me that everybody in the house had gone out to some wedding and, if I wanted, I could meet with the sick man now.

The people here hadn't invited me inside the house up to now. Perhaps I really shouldn't go. I thought for a while and then followed the nurse through the side-door. After passing through several sections of the house, we came into a section the greater part of which looked unoccupied. Coming to the open door of a room, she asked me to wait there and went in herself.

I saw the patient from the door. He was sitting on his bed and his eyes were apparently searching for something on the floor. After a while he lifted his head and looked at the girl, who beckoned for me to come in. After some hesitation I entered. The patient's eyes had again started to search for something on the floor but I somehow felt that he was, in reality, observing me. Finally, he lifted his head and turned his face toward me.

We kept looking at each other, in silence, for the longest time ever. Our faces didn't betray any kind of curiosity. His eyes had an intensity, a brightness, but throughout this time, never for a moment did they seem to be devoid of feeling. I could not understand if his eyes were trying to say something or were merely observing me, but I felt we were coming to some silent understanding. All of a sudden a terrible feeling of despair came over me. It was the first time I'd felt like this since I'd come to this house. Just then his nurse placed her hand on my arm and led me out of the room.

Outside, as I spoke with his nurse, I realized that my speech was a shortcoming and that the patient was traveling far ahead of me on a road I knew nothing about.

7

Bouts of despair strike me; still I let my curiosity grow as much as, or even more than, before. The people who live here still become flustered by my questions. I continue to tell the nurse all kinds of interesting stories and inquire after the patient's condition. But when I'm seized by an attack of despair, I feel as if tiny yellow leaves are coming down in a shower between the nurse and myself. The boy who must own this house

one day begins to seem like a vanishing shadow. And the ceiling of my resting place feels like it's right on top of my chest. □

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*

Epistle*

My days among the dead are past.

—ROBERT SOUTHEY

Ābīd ke kubār shudand-o-trībīd ke navāid

(Those who have turned old and these who
are new)

—‘UMAR KHAYYAM

“Respected Sir,

Through your esteemed newspaper, I would like to draw the attention of the appropriate authorities to the western sector of this city. I feel compelled to say, with great regret, that today, when large-scale development is taking place in the city and the residents of every other sector are being provided the most modern facilities, the western sector remains deprived of even a water supply and power. It looks as though this city has only three sides. When, after a long period, necessity drove me to the western sector recently, I found it in exactly the same condition as in my childhood.”

I

I HAD NO PERSONAL NEED TO GO THERE, but I felt obliged on account of my mother. Years ago, at the onset of old age, she had lost her ability to

* From the author's second collection *Tār-e Kāfir* (Lucknow: Nigāmi Press, 1990), pp. 11–30.

walk, and later she nearly lost her eyesight. Her mind had also become muddled. In spite of her infirmity she would call me near her three or four times every day and she would feel around my whole body with trembling hands. Actually it had seemed to her from the time I was born that I wasn't healthy. Sometimes she thought my body was too cold, sometimes too hot; sometimes she thought my voice had changed; and sometimes that the color of my eyes looked different. Because she belonged to an old family of hakims, she had come to know the names and treatments for many illnesses by heart. Every few days she would declare that I was suffering from some new ailment and then insist on treating it. During the early days of her infirmity it happened a couple of times that I became engrossed in some work and forgot to visit her in her room, so she managed, God knows how, to drag herself to the door. After more time had passed, when her remaining vitality had also ebbed away, her physician kept me away from her for one whole day just to test whether she had any strength left in her arms and feet. She also remained unmindful of me, or so it seemed. But when, hearing her moan softly late at night, I rushed to her, I saw that she had traversed about half the distance to the door. Her bedding, which she had started to spread out on the floor ever since the death of my father, had been dragged right along with her; or rather, it seemed that it was the bedding itself that was dragging her along toward the door. When she saw me she tried to say something but fell into unconsciousness from exhaustion and remained in that state for several days. Her physician acknowledged his mistake over and over again, expressing regret for putting her through this ordeal, because, following this episode, my mother's sight and mind both became impaired, until, gradually, her presence and absence became one.

A long time has passed since even her physician died. Recently, though, when I woke up one night, I saw her sitting on the floor near my feet, groping around my bed with one hand. I quickly sat up.

"You ..." I said, looking at the web of protruding veins on the back of her hand, "... have come here!"

"To see you ... how are you feeling?" she said, haltingly, before a daze came over her.

I got out of the bed and sat down beside her on the floor, staring at her for a long time. I tried to recall my earliest image of her face as it was preserved in my memory, and for a few moments that face appeared before my eyes. Meanwhile she emerged from her daze a bit. Attempting to help her rise slowly, I said, "Come, let me take you to your room."

"No," she said with enormous difficulty, "first tell me."

"Tell you what?" I asked, in a tired voice.

"How do you feel?"

Actually, I hadn't been feeling well for a few days, so I said, "I don't feel well."

Contrary to my expectation, she didn't ask me for the details of my illness; instead, she only asked, "So did you have someone examine you?"

"Who should I go to?"

I knew what answer would be forthcoming. The one she always gave immediately and in a sharp tone. This time, after a long silence, she did say the same thing, but with tremendous sadness and a little despair, "Why don't you go there?"

I used to go there with her in my childhood. It was a family of old hakims who were close relatives of my mother. Their house was very large and several families lived in its different sections. The head of all those families was a Hakim Sahib, hardly known in the city, but who nonetheless commanded a group of patients from neighboring villages much larger than any of the renowned doctors in the city.

A lot of celebrations took place in that house, and my mother was invited specially to them; often she took me along as well. I used to watch the strange ceremonies that took place during those celebrations with tremendous fascination. It also didn't escape me that great deference was shown to my mother there and that a wave of happiness swept over the entire place the minute she arrived. For her own part, she never neglected to show proper courtesy to one and all. She called the younger members present, and those her own age, over to her, but went to the elders herself, and everyone accepted her judgment in the family disputes which frequently arose there.

There were many people there, but I remembered, as though through a fog, only the face of Hakim Sahib, and that perhaps only because there was a slight family resemblance between him and my mother. What I do remember clearly, though, is that women, men and children of all ages used to be present in that place and that my mother, surrounded by them all, appeared to me like a flower in the midst of so many leaves.

Now, though, with her withered face turned toward me, she was trying to look at my face with her sightless eyes.

"Your voice sounds hoarse. Avoid eating oily foods," she said, and then said again, "Why don't you go there?"

"There . . . I won't even be able to recognize anyone there."

"You will, when you see them. If not, they'll clear it up for you."

"It's been such a long time," I said. "I don't remember how to get there anymore."

"You'll start to remember when you set out."

"How?" I said. "Everything must have changed."

"Nothing's changed," she said. She again began to drift into unconsciousness, still she managed to say one more time, "Nothing's changed," and then she became completely unconscious.

I sat supporting her for a long time. I tried to recall the way to that house by imagining the days when I had accompanied her there. I also tried to remember the layout of the house. All that came back to my mind was the mound—known as Hakims' Perch—straight across from the main entrance. And yes, also that Hakims' Perch was located on the western side of the city, that it had a few bushes and unpaved graves, and that the last signs of the city ended by the time one reached it.

I picked my mother up in my arms, just as she once used to pick me up in hers, and felt as though I had paid back some of what I owed her. And even though she was entirely unconscious, I said to her, "Come, let me help you to your room. Come morning, I shall definitely go *there*."

I woke up the next morning a little after sunrise, and some time after I woke up I set out from the house.

2

I hadn't passed through the western side of my own neighborhood in a long time. Now as I did, I noticed a lot of changes. Mud houses had become brick houses; vacant compounds had turned into small bazaars. A warehouse for lumber had sprung up on the ruins of an old tomb. None of the faces I was familiar with a long time ago could be seen. However, I did meet several people who knew me, and I knew some of them, though I didn't know they lived in my own neighborhood. I also spoke to them, just the usual pleasantries, but I didn't tell anyone where I was headed.

Soon I had left my neighborhood behind. Then I came to the grain-market and left that behind too, and then the medicine-and-spice market.

Paved roads ran on either side of these markets and stretched far into the distance, with temporary snack shops and drink stalls along the way. However, on the road I was now walking on I could see potholes straight ahead in several places, and further down it turned completely into a dirt road. Even though I didn't remember the way, I was sure that I was walking in the right direction so I kept going.

The heat of the sun had become stronger. By now even the traces of the dirt road had disappeared, but it could still be imagined between the two crooked rows of dust-covered trees. Suddenly the rows disintegrated in such a way that nothing of the road was left except a vague hint, splitting in five directions like the fingers of a spread out hand. Here, I wavered. It hadn't been long since I had left the house; I was certain that I wasn't too far from my neighborhood. Still I stopped and tried to figure out the way back. I turned around and looked. Dust-covered trees stood everywhere on the uneven terrain. I had imagined the dirt road between the rows of these trees; perhaps the rows themselves were the creation of my imagination because now I couldn't see them anywhere. In my estimation I was proceeding along a straight road, but I had often experienced how seemingly straight roads turned this way or that imperceptibly, throwing the wayfarer completely off course. I was convinced that this far into the journey I had already detoured several times and if I didn't find some trace of the road I simply wouldn't be able to make it back home on my own. However, at the time I was more concerned with *Hakims' Perch*, which appeared to be nowhere in sight, than with how I'd get back home. Although trees were everywhere they were so scraggly that no sizeable portion of the ground was hidden from my view. But the ground to my right, sloping upward far into the distance, was so dotted with thick bushes, practically fused into each other, that it was impossible to see what lay on the other side of this slope.

If there was anything, it had to be on the other side—I thought, and set out in that direction. And I was right. The instant I emerged from a large tract of overcrowded bushes I saw a single-story house made of small brown bricks rising before me. This was not the house I was looking for. Nevertheless I proceeded straight toward it. A nameplate, most of its letters nearly obliterated, hung on the door. It was quiet inside the house, but not the kind of quiet to be found outside of deserted houses, so I knocked three times at the door. After some time there was a slight sound of movement on the other side of the door and someone asked, "Who is it?"

What would be the point of telling that, I thought to myself, and said instead, "I seem to have lost my way; is Hakims' Perch somewhere around here?"

"Hakims' Perch ... Where have you come from?"

This was quite irrelevant. I felt a bit annoyed at having my question answered with a question; but it was a woman on the other side and she spoke gently and sounded extremely polite. She was holding onto the slightly ajar door, but just lightly. Her fingernails were painted orange. A faint memory crossed my mind. Just then the door opened a tad bit more and in the span of a second I caught a glimpse of a smallish, dimly lit *dewahi*, the courtyard beyond it, and the sun falling on a few branches of the pomegranate tree growing in one of its corners. In the next second I vaguely remembered that Mother used to stop briefly at this house too. But I wasn't able to also remember the people who lived in this house.

"Have you come from some place abroad?" the voice came again from behind the door.

"No," I said, and explained to her who I was. Then I said, "I've come this way after a very long time."

After a lengthy pause I got the answer, "Please go to the back of the house. You'll see the Perch straight across."

The heavy voice of an old woman arose inside the house, "Mehr, who is it?"

I thanked her formally and went to the back of the house. Up ahead a number of hills, large and small, could be seen, their disorderly rows once again giving the impression of a road. These hills were just big mounds of earth, but slightly away from them bushes could be seen on another mound. I looked closely at this other mound: signs of mud graves were evident among the bushes. The whitewash on some of these graves glistened in the strong sunlight.

3

The house I was looking for was behind the Perch, and I had to go half-way around the Perch to reach it. Standing in front of the massive, old wooden main entrance, I thought for quite a while about how to announce my arrival. The wood of the door was quite thick and somewhat damp; nothing could be gained by knocking at it. Still I tapped three times, but even I couldn't hear them. The thought crossed my mind that the house was probably deserted. I gave the door a gentle push. Both

of its panels turned smoothly on their hinges and opened, unfolding before me a spacious *deurhi* with a small door on its opposite end. This second door was wide open but a curtain of double-layered sackcloth hung over the entrance. I walked over to the door. Now I could hear people inside the house talking. I knocked and a voice called out to someone, "Go see, somebody's at the door."

At that point my mind became crowded with thoughts. Who all lives here? What should I say to whom? What reason should I give for my visit? How shall I make them recognize me? The urge to walk away came over me, but just then a woman's curt voice asked from behind the curtain, "Who is it?"

I gave her my full name.

"Who have you come to see?"

I had only one answer to this. "The Hakim Sahib," I said.

"The *matib* [dispensary] is on the other side. Please go there. He's getting ready."

Her voice had begun to fade away with the last of her words so I said quickly and a little loudly, "Please tell those inside."

The voice again came close, this time markedly less curt, "Where have you come from?"

Here, again, I introduced myself. Then I paused, mentioned my mother's name, paused again, and gave the name my mother was called at home, saying that I was her son, and then hesitantly I gave the pet name which used to annoy me in childhood. I went through all this in a rather haphazard manner and the woman behind the curtain relayed it somewhat more coherently to someone there who had asked for it, whereupon the voices of the women talking inside became louder and faster for a bit. I heard them repeat my mother's informal name and my pet name several times. I was hearing both of these names again after a long time. I became convinced that if I kept hearing them for a while I'd no doubt begin to recall the entire layout of this house along with all its dwellers; in fact, the image of a spacious courtyard had already started to take shape in my mind. Just then, the sackcloth curtain moved toward me with a rustle and then rose upward, allowing the front wheel of a bicycle to emerge from behind it. I stepped to one side and a boy walked into the *deurhi* holding onto a bicycle. He greeted me and went out the front door. I stood waiting silently. After a while muffled sounds rose from behind the curtain, followed by a few ducks that came into the *deurhi*. The disorderly fashion in which they were moving clearly indicated that they had been shoed out of the house. They waddled toward the front door, quacking

among themselves. Meanwhile nothing was heard from inside the house for some time. I became tired of standing in the *deewbi* and began to imagine that the silence which wafts from deserted houses was pouring out from behind the curtain continually in an attempt to engulf me. Just then somebody on the other side of the curtain said, "Please come inside."

Pushing on the double-layered curtain, I stepped into the courtyard of that house.

4

In my childhood I had seen any number of houses with large courtyards and small courtyards, with double and triple dalans, overhanging balconies, and wooden arches. This house wasn't any different; I still couldn't recall having frequented it at some point. Stopping in the middle of the courtyard for a few seconds, I noticed that every part of the house was occupied. In several small courtyards women were straining their necks and peering at me with curiosity. I tried to guess where the mistress of the house was most likely to be found and proceeded straight to the dalan where big lanterns hung from its high arches. A large *chauka* made of wooden boards sat on the floor with heavy-looking canopied beds on either side of it. The beds all had sparkling, freshly-washed sheets, still crisp with starch. An old lady sat on the *chauka*. I greeted her without knowing who she was. She smiled, showered me with blessings, and said, "Son, what caused you to wander in here today?"

It occurred to me that this question was not intended to be answered, so with as much courtesy as I could possibly muster I inquired after her health. And she said, "Why, you'd hardly remember now, but when you came here as a child you just wouldn't want to go back home."

Then she recounted many occasions when my mother had to grieve for days because of my insistence.

"And even then you left here crying," she said, wiping her eyes with the edge of her dupatta.

Meanwhile, women continued assembling in the large courtyard from different parts of the house. Most took the initiative and introduced themselves. I was not one to grasp convoluted relationships; still I tried to look as though I recognized every woman who introduced herself and already knew how we were related. The women's hair was heavily oiled and combed, and all of them were draped in coarse cotton dupattas, some seemingly dyed at home. Each one had a collection of stories about my

childhood. I was shown a guava tree at the edge of the courtyard from which I had taken a fall and been knocked unconscious, causing my mother to fall unconscious too. When the subject of my planks came up, I found out that not a single woman present had escaped becoming the target of one of them.

I realized that I hadn't spoken a word for quite a while. Perhaps they were now waiting for me to say something since the courtyard had become somewhat hushed. I swept my gaze around and saw a few girls sitting on one side of the *chanka*. When I asked them about their studies and what other things they did to occupy themselves, they blushed and started to edge closer to one another, while somebody else answered on their behalf. At some point three boys had come in and they were sitting at a distance from the girls. I talked to them about a few things I thought might interest them, but I had no idea what their interests were. The boys seemed stupid to me, the girls ugly, although I did like the way the girls drew back from modesty. I was fishing for some topic of interest to the boys when a rattling sound was heard at the door. The boy with the bicycle had returned holding in his hands something wrapped in newspaper cones which had begun to ooze oil. He looked at the *dalan* and made a sign. Promptly the girls got up and left. Shortly thereafter sounds of their laughing and of the clanking of china rose from a part of the house nearby. I sensed a vague resemblance between the two sounds; I also suspected that they were imitating the way I talked.

How long had I been sitting in this *dalan*? I tried to guess. Just then a door opened to my left and I saw Hakim Sahib standing behind the teed screen that was hanging in front of it. I recognized him instantly. He was trying to adjust the angle of his cap. Then, turning his face toward the screen, he started groping for something in his pockets. I saw another door behind him with a crowd of peasant men and women near it.

"Listen everyone! I'm coming in," he announced as he lifted the screen.

"You may come in now," the mistress of the house said. "Look, who's here—recognize him?"

By now Hakim Sahib had walked into the *dalan*. I quickly got up and greeted him. Repeating my whole name softly he said, "Miyan, you've changed so much. If I had seen you elsewhere, I wouldn't have recognized you."

For a while he recounted some of the things that had happened in my childhood and also told anecdotes about my father's unwavering defence. Meanwhile a maidservant walked in with a rather long brass tray

of snacks. I glanced at the delicate china plates. Most of the foods on them had been bought from the bazaar, but some items were also home-made. Hakim Sahib pointed at the tray and said, "Now don't let ceremony stand in the way." Then he said to his wife, "All right then. I'm going to be late getting to the *matâb*."

After that he went back to his room.

"The *matâb* keeps him so busy," the mistress of the house said apologetically. She also said something more but I may have dozed for a moment. When I became alert she was the only one left in the *dalan* and curtains of some coarse material were swaying in two of the arches. Only the arch in the middle was still open and the lantern hanging there swayed, sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, in the wind. I looked in the direction of the reed screen. Near the door that was behind it, Hakim Sahib had his hand on the pulse of an old peasant man and seemed to be lost in thought. I turned toward the mistress. She too had dozed, but the muffled sound of girls' laughter coming from some small courtyard nearby made her sit up alert.

"Has Mehr come?" she asked herself, and I saw a faint trace of anxiety sweep over her otherwise contented face for the first time. Just then the curtain drawn over the right arch moved to one side and a young woman entered the *dalan*. I gave her a fleeting glance. She was dressed in an orange sari made of some wrinkle-proof fabric and she wore nail polish of the same color. The mistress turned toward me, "Do you recognize Mehr?"

I again glanced at the young woman's face. She was wearing a fair shade of orange lipstick. I answered her greeting by shaking my head as if I recognized her, just as I had for the other women. I was about to look at her more closely when some girl called to her softly from behind the curtain and she went out of the *dalan*.

Hakim Sahib still had his hand on the old peasant's pulse and the mistress had again begun to doze. I got up. The mistress looked toward me with half-opened eyes, and I said, "With your permission I'll go now."

"So you want to go?" she asked in a heavy voice, and suddenly I remembered something.

"That ... scary room ... is it still there?" I asked.

"The scary room?" she said thinking, and then she recalled with a melancholy smile, "Once you locked Mehr up in that room." The melancholy in her smile deepened. "At least you remembered something of this place."

"Is it still there?"

"It's there all right. Over there, the door by the *deewhi*. It's not much. The kitchen used to be there before. The walls are black from the smoke. Has a door that opens to the outside. Must be open. The latch doesn't fasten anymore."

"I'll let myself out that way," I said, raising my hand to say good-bye, and turned toward the courtyard.

"Do come sometimes as you have today. Back then you came almost daily," she took a deep breath and her voice trembled a little, "Time has made such a big difference, son."

Her lips were still moving, but I walked across the courtyard and went through the door adjoining the *deewhi*.

5

There was nothing unusual about the room. The ceiling and walls were coated with soot. But that hadn't made it overly dark. A large hearth, fashioned from wet clay mixed with chaff, stood on one side, but it had become dilapidated. In front of me I could see a vertical shaft of light.

Must be the door opening to the outside, I told myself, and coming close to the shaft I peered through it. I could see Hakims' Perch straight across. I felt the cool touch of the dangling iron latch on my forehead and pulled it toward me. One of the door's panels opened. I let go of the latch, the panel slowly closed on its own. I did this a couple of times, recalling how opening such doors and then watching them close on their own used to be my favorite pastime as a child. I pulled both the panels toward me simultaneously and went out.

A few moments later I was in back of the one-story brown brick house. Hakims' Perch and the bushes and graves on it could be seen more clearly now. I sensed that something was missing there and immediately the thought occurred to me that I had not gone to the top of the Perch to have a look. At the very same instant I recalled something else. I turned back around and walked up to the top.

There were more graves than I had imagined but the dense patch of straw, which was believed to harbor an ancient snake, had disappeared. Those who claimed to have seen the snake said that hair had spouted on its hood. Children used to play near the straw patch, and I even used to hide inside of it, but the snake had never harmed anyone. Perhaps that's why it was widely believed that the snake had stood guard over the Hakim family for generations. By now the image of the partly dry, partly

green straw patch had been completely resurrected in my memory, but what I couldn't remember was its precise location on the Perch. The place where I suspected it to be was occupied by several graves sparkling from the lime wash.

I kept looking at the main door of the house from the Perch. The desire to go and knock on it began to well up inside of me, and I even took a few steps in its direction, but then I stopped.

That would be an absolutely absurd thing to do, I thought, and started to come down from the Perch in the opposite direction from the house.

The way back was not difficult. I reached my home easily. □

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*

Ganjefa*

* ... Ganjefa, as I've already mentioned, has eight suits, of which the higher ones are *ray*, *zar-e safed*, *shamsbir*, and *ghulam* and the lower ones are *chang*, *zar-e surkh*, *barat*, and *qumach*.

"The king of *zar-e surkh*, called *afsh* [sun], is the most important card in the game, followed by the king of *zar-e safed* which enjoys the title of *mahsh* [moon]. *Mahsh*, naturally, has a lower status than *afsh*, provided the latter is shining.

* ... In the daytime he who holds the *afsh* card starts the game, with *mahsh* carrying a lesser value, or rather no value at all, before it. At night, though, the power and value of the *afsh* is transferred over to *mahsh* and *afsh* is reduced in status to that of an ordinary card."

[*Letters of the Faravah*]

I

I BEGAN TO FEEL BAD ABOUT MY LIFE the night of the riots. On my way home from the cemetery that night, I was stopped several times and interrogated. Well, not quite interrogated, I was asked just three questions: "What's your name?" "Where do you live?" and "What do you do?" I answered the first two right away but invariably faltered at the third. While I would be thinking of an appropriate answer they would let me go with a stern order to return home immediately. Then they would stop some other passerby and subject him to the same questions. During this exercise a couple of people even got beaten up. At first the thought that the third question might well result in my getting roughed up too scared

* "*Ganjefa*" or "*ganjefa*" is a game of cards (also means a pack of cards). The story first appeared in the *AUS*, No. 12 (1997), pp. 231-64.

me quite a bit, so I became nervous trying to answer it, but as I drew closer to my home I started to feel a bit testy about the question itself. When I was asked, "What do you do?" for the last time, I answered in my heart, "I live off the earnings of my mother."

Father had also lived off my mother's earnings. Asthma and addiction to playing the lottery had pretty much made him a good-for-nothing. I never saw him do anything other than cough away as he lay in bed, or tear up lottery tickets and toss them away. Mother managed to pay the expenses of the household from the money she earned doing chikan embroidery work. It was Mother again who had looked after my education, during which time she somehow got it into her head that I might also catch my father's disease so she packed me off to her foster sister in Allahabad for further studies. I'm certain that every month she also sent this sister a little something extra, over and above my expenses. My father passed away two or three years after I left for Allahabad, but I finished my education there and only then returned to my native Lucknow. And now, for the past several years, I have merely been roaming around, living off my mother's wages like my father before me. If I have done any work at all, it hasn't gone beyond lighting a lamp at my father's grave every Thursday. All the same, I had felt good about my life.

The night of the riots, in trying to answer the third question, I saw this life of mine, this life about which I had felt good, play out before me over and over, each time in exactly the same way, until I began to feel anger toward myself and pity for my mother, both of which, the anger as well as the pity, grew worse, especially when I arrived at our door and found out from the neighbors that my mother, draping her burqa around her, had ventured out looking for me the minute she heard the news of the riots and hadn't yet returned. They had done their best to stop her, but she paid no heed to anyone. It occurred to me that she must also have been subjected to the same questions, "What's your name?" "Where do you live?" and "What do you do?" I was about to set out in search of her but the neighbors forcibly held me back. Mother had extracted an oath from them that in the event I returned before she did and attempted to go out looking for her they wouldn't allow me to. The neighbors were asking me about the riots but I evaded them by saying that I didn't know anything. And that was indeed true. I was worried about Mother and wasn't about to be stopped by the neighbors, but I stopped myself thinking that if she returned while I was gone she would set out searching

for me again. So I went inside the house. In the courtyard my meal was laid out covered with a tray on a chowki and a neighbor woman sat near it waiting for me. Mother had also asked her on her oath to make me eat as soon as I got back. I asked her to leave. I had no urge to eat even though I was feeling terribly hungry, so I washed my hands and mouth and sat down near the tray. Just then Mother returned.

Outside, the neighbors had already informed her that I was back, safe and sound. Nevertheless she entered the house weeping and wailing as if she was being brought in to look at my dead body. And when she reached me she did everything a mother would do on finding her missing son. I realized then that she still thought of me as a small child accustomed to holding onto his mother's hand as he walked. I also realized that I was grown up and yet there was only one way I could answer "What do you do?"

From the time she fed me until the time she made me lie down on the bed while she patted me, she kept touching me again and again as if she wasn't certain I had come back home in one piece. I was now lying quietly and had started to feel sleepy, while Mother sat nearby scrutinizing me. After a while, she asked, "Did something happen?"

"No, nothing," I answered. "Why?"

"Nothing happened along the way?"

"Nothing at all," I said. "Why do you ask?"

"Did someone say something?"

"No."

She continued staring at me, and then said, "From now on I won't let you go out anymore."

At that point I said, "From now on, Mother, I won't live off your earnings."

That very night Mother had her first bout of coughing.

Without telling my mother I started to sneak out looking for work, but I didn't know the first thing about how to find work. I just roamed around as I used to and then came back home. After a few days when I went out I didn't even remember that it was to look for work. But I no longer enjoyed roaming around. Gradually I started going out less and less, or rather I should say more and more, because now I stepped out several times a day, only to come back shortly thereafter, go out again, return again

Around that time, one day I saw Mother holding a very fine piece of some white cloth close to her eyes and embroidering an exceedingly delicate vine on it with white thread. I sat down on a chowki close to her and said, "Mother, don't hold the cloth so close to your eyes. It'll ruin your eyesight."

"It's already quite weak, Son," she said. Then she had a mild attack of coughing.

"You've started to cough a lot too."

"It comes and goes," she said, "but it's the breathlessness at night ..."

"Isn't there any medicine ..."

"There is," she said, "and I take it. It helps too."

Obviously it wasn't helping, or perhaps she wasn't actually taking it at all. One day I brought the subject up again, "Mother, your cough isn't getting any better."

"Really it has. It only flares up during the night," she told me, and then, after a pause, she asked, "It doesn't disturb your sleep, does it?"

No, it didn't disturb my sleep. One night, though, I woke up in the middle of a dream. It was dark. I couldn't recall my dream. I tried but I couldn't. I turned over in bed and was about to go back to sleep when I heard the muffled sound of Mother's coughing. A wave of drowsiness swept over me, followed by a second wave, but the sound of coughing persisted. I opened my eyes wide and strained my ears. The sound was coming from the courtyard. I sat up in bed. The courtyard was illuminated by the faint light of the stars, but Mother couldn't be seen there.

"Mother!" I called out for her, "what are you doing in the courtyard?"

I could only hear a string of coughs in response. I got out of bed and walked out into the courtyard. She was sitting on the ground next to the well. I approached her and called to her. Then I bent down and looked closely. She was coughing away with a corner of her dupatta rolled into a ball and tucked into her mouth, while her body jerked about fitfully in silent spasms. I sat down near her.

"You've been coughing for a long time," I said. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

She was in no condition to reply. I helped her up and brought her into the dalan. Then I made her sit on her bed and tried to rub her back. It took some time before her breathing began to ease. She asked for water and after sipping it she said, "Why did you get up?"

"I had a dream," I told her. And I began to remember it, but only dimly.

"Go back to sleep," she said. "I'll sleep too."

"I dreamt that I was eating my meal and you were sitting in front of me fanning me."

She broke into a laugh. "You call that a dream?" she said, and at the same time I said, "Mother, teach me to do *chikan* embroidery."

She looked at me with some concern and said, "No, Son, you'll ruin your eyes."

"Then teach me some other work," I said, "or find me a job somewhere. How long will I have to live off your wages as Father did?"

She remained silent for some time and then said, "Well go back to sleep now. I'm feeling sleepy too."

Then she lay down and pulled her *dupatta* over her face.

The minute I got up in the morning I started pestering Mother, totally forgetting that I was myself behaving like a child who wanted to hold his mother's hand while walking. She listened quietly to my repeated demands until I again said, "How long will I, like Father ..." and her face turned red. But she only patted me on the cheek and said very gently, "What's this, boy, why have you suddenly become an enemy of your father?"

"Enemy, not at all, Mother. But haven't you suffered on account of him?"

"What have I suffered? It's he who suffered. What man enjoys feeding himself on his wife's wages? In his time he earned well and provided for me. When he stopped earning ..."

"I don't recall ever seeing him earn any money."

"What have you seen anyway, Son," she said, suddenly on the verge of tears. "What comfort was there that that departed soul didn't give me!? And all that he did for you too!"

"For me?" I asked. "What did he ever do for me?"

"He was planning to send you to England."

"England?"

"To study," she said. "But he couldn't. So you may say what you will now."

She again seemed to be almost on the brink of crying and remained silent for a while.

"England ..."

"Even before you were born he had made it plain that if it was a boy he would send him to England for an education."

"England ... Do you even know where England is?" I asked.

"Why would I know," she said. "He used to say it was some sort of college across the seven seas."

"Did he even have any idea how much money it would have cost?"

"Why wouldn't he know? He did the calculations after talking to many people."

"And how much did it come to?"

"How would I know how much it came to. It was a huge sum—that's all I know."

"Then?"

"Then what? That brave man of God didn't loose heart. First off he sold the properties in Rustam Nagar and Shah Ganj."

"He sold off two houses?"

"Houses? They were more like ruins," she said. "Next he borrowed as much money from his office as he could. Some money came from selling my jewelry."

"He even made you sell off your jewelry?"

"Well, he'd set his heart on it."

"What about your heart?"

"His wish was my wish. But it did hurt me to see those preparations. Our only child and this trip across seven seas ..."

"OK, OK, where did all that money go?"

Mother remained quiet. Her prolonged silence prompted me to ask, "He blew it all on the lottery, didn't he?"

"No. The lottery came only after he had no money left ... I used to give him money for the lottery."

"So where did he lose all his money?"

"He never did tell me that, nor did I ask. But this much I know, he wasn't involved in anything bad."

After that she lapsed into a silence which made it seem inappropriate to query her further. So I too became silent. But when she got up to go to the kitchen, I stopped her. "OK, what happened next?"

"Nothing happened. His respiratory ailment completely incapacitated him. Whenever he had an attack of asthma, it seemed as if he had stopped breathing. His office retired him on a pension before the end of his term of service."

"How much did he get from his pension?"

"God knows. I never got to see any of it."

"So he squandered his pension too?"

At this her face again turned red.

"What's this you're saying, 'He squandered it. He squandered it.' He was not a man to squander."

"So then the pension ..."

"He sold it off to pay back the loan he'd gotten from his office. Well, call it squandering if you must."

"What office did Father work in?" I asked.

"It had a long English name; I never could remember it."

"What was his position there?"

"That too had an English name."

She again didn't say a word for a long time. Finally I said, "OK, tell me more about Father."

"What shall I tell you?" she said. "When he returned after selling off his pension he just stayed in the house for two days without touching food. He was dead set on ending his life. Only after I swore to him on my oath that you would die if he did that, did he come to his senses."

"And then?"

"Then what? I picked up a needle the very next day."

"Did you know chikan work?"

"Already from when I was little."

"Who taught you?" I asked realizing that I also knew next to nothing about my mother.

"My *phuphi-amma*," she replied. "She used to embroider as a hobby. I learnt it for fun. But it gave me a skill, otherwise I'd be sweeping floors or washing dishes in any and everyone's houses."

Then Mother told me that she had herself taught chikan embroidery to several poor girls who had later started to work for wages. When Father became indigent these very girls came to help. It was through them that Mother also started to get work from an embroidery wholesaler in Gool Darwaza. She praised the wholesaler, "The Lala is a good man. A connoisseur of fine quality work. If he likes the workmanship, he pays extra."

Then she went off on another tangent and kept talking about this and that for a long time. I had no idea that she could talk so well. Lost in listening to what she was saying, I forgot how we had started off on this conversation. But she hadn't—of that I'm certain.

I ventured out of the house even less now. Most of the time I sat idly and, without really paying attention, I just looked at Mother perched on a

chowki working away at her embroidery and coughing every now and then. Sometimes when she was seized by a fit of coughing, I rushed to her with some water or rubbed her back. She recovered in a short time and took hold of her needle again.

One day as I was rubbing her back gently, my eyes fell on some lengths of cloth piled up beside her and I said, "Mother, you really shouldn't work so much."

"It's coarse work," she said, "it doesn't take much time."

I looked at the colored pieces of rough material again. I also noticed that she had embroidered large flowers on them with colored threads. Up until now I'd only seen her embroider on very soft, fine material with white thread. I picked up an embroidered red ochre piece and asked, "What kind of embroidery is this? Before you used to ..."

"I can't handle delicate work anymore. My hand shakes. And my eyesight isn't what it used to be." She drew a deep breath and continued, "In the beginning my work was exported to England."

"England?"

"My work received high praise there, though not my name. The Lala says that even now specimens of my old work are sent to him asking for more of the same."

"But this ..." I said picking up another piece of faded material and examining the flowers on it.

"Just ordinary work," she said. "Whatever happens to be popular."

"Who would wear it?"

"Why, people wear it a lot, men as well as women."

"I never saw anyone wearing it."

"There's a lot you haven't seen. Next time when you go out, pay special attention."

She removed my hand from her back and picked up a piece of material and her needle. Holding the piece very close to her eyes she studied the traced pattern for some time and then started to stitch along the pattern. I watched the same pattern emerge in colored thread. I looked at her and found her looking at me, while her needle followed along the printed design. I looked at her again; she was still gazing at me.

"Mother, you embroider without looking at the pattern?"

"I've looked at it already."

"But you've looked at it only once."

"What's the need to look at it over and over," she said. Then she said again, "It's coarse work."

I sat quietly watching her work. She was really embroidering quite fast. After she had finished a piece she immediately picked up another, brought it close to her eyes and examined the pattern, and then she let her needle run along it. She kept up that way until it was late at night. She picked up the finished work, counted the pieces a few times and put them to one side after neatly folding them. Then she picked up the unfinished pieces, counted them as well, and kept looking at me for some time. Afterward she said, "Aren't you sleepy?"

"I am," I said. "You go to sleep too. It's rather late."

"There are only a few pieces left to do," she said, "I'll finish them and then go to bed."

"There are quite a few. Leave them. You can finish them tomorrow."

"They aren't that many. It won't take me long," she said, and then said again, "It's coarse work."

Her needle got going again. For a while I watched a big maroon flower with five or six petals begin to take shape on a piece of cloth. Then I lay down on my bed and, perhaps immediately, fell asleep facing the wall.

A few times my sleep was interrupted briefly by my mother's coughing, from which I concluded that she was still awake and working and it was not quite morning yet.

When my sleep broke, well into the day, I saw that Mother had fallen asleep right there on the chowki. One of her hands was lying on the unfinished pieces. I guessed that they were more or less the same number as when I went to sleep. I went close to her and looked. Her needle was stuck at the very top of the piece in the fourth petal of the maroon flower. I grabbed her shoulder and shook it gently. She always woke up at the slightest sound so I looked at her intently. I couldn't tell whether she was asleep or unconscious. When I began to shake her shoulder vigorously she started and opened her eyes.

"Are you all right, Mother?"

"I'm all right," she said. "Don't worry, I'm all right."

"Did you feel unwell during the night?"

"No ... yes, a little ..."

Just then she suffered another coughing spasm. I rushed and brought some water. As I was giving it to her I noticed that her hand was trembling badly.

"Here, let me hold it for you," I said and helped her drink the water. Then I helped her onto the bed and sat down close to her head. After a while she started gasping for breath and sat up. I tried to lay her down again but she made a sign with her hand telling me not to. About noon her condition improved a little. Every few minutes I asked her how she was feeling, but she seemed to have lapsed into silence. She barely answered yes or no. One time I asked her, "Mother, would you like something to eat?" and she shook her head no. I hadn't eaten anything myself since morning and was feeling hungry.

"Do eat something," I said to her.

She shook her head no and remained silent for a long time. Then, suddenly, she said in a loud voice, "Call Husna."

"Husna?"

"You know where she lives?"

I didn't even know who Husna was. I was hearing this name for the first time. Meanwhile Mother had another of her coughing bouts. I started to rub her back but she moved my hand away and said haltingly in between fits of coughing, "Husna ... You don't know her house? ... the one which has the peepal tree ... the one between the firecrackers and the incense sticks ..."

She thrust her head between her knees and started to cough. I was worried about leaving her alone in this condition, but when she lifted her head and found me still there she said in a louder voice, "You didn't go?" and I sensed such desperation in her voice that I immediately stepped out of the house.

I knew where the firecrackers shop was located in the Chowk. I had seen it there ever since my childhood. But I had no idea that beyond it there was another shop where they sold incense sticks and that a lane separated the two shops. It was a fairly wide lane that twisted and turned far into the distance, with an abundance of houses, all more or less crumbling, on either side of it. It was perhaps their crumbly state that made the lane look rather wide. Not a single tree could be seen anywhere. I proceeded along the lane's meandering course until I saw the crown of a peepal tree behind two houses. A few moments later I found myself standing before a fairly wide wall with loose bricks. The peepal tree was growing through this wall and its widely spread roots were holding the wall together tenaciously. A little ways away from the roots was the house's half-open door.

I knocked with the door ring a few times. A man's voice said from inside, "Coming."

The voice seemed somewhat familiar. As I was trying to place it, the thought of my mother's condition at that very moment intervened. Standing at the door I was also struck by the thought that I hadn't left her with a neighborhood woman to watch over her. I remembered her breathlessness, the hacking coughs that shook her body, her trembling hands. I was about to rush back home when, behind the half-open door, I noticed a woman standing in the dimly lit *deorhi* staring at me. I looked in her direction; she took a step forward and pushed on the open panel of the door leaving it only slightly ajar. Then I heard her say, "Who is it?"

"Is this Husna Sahib's residence?" I asked.

"Yes, it is."

"Might you be ..."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Mother is unwell. She's asked for you."

She kept staring at me for a while from behind the door. I felt as though she hadn't quite understood me. So I said, "She's having immense difficulty breathing and her cough ... She's also shivering. She's asked for you to come quickly. Perhaps ..."

I stopped. She still said nothing and I wondered whether she had understood me at all. I said, "At the moment, she's all alone at home."

She said slowly, "I was just giving Father his food. Please go back, I'll be along soon."

I hastened back without waiting for her to turn around.

Mother still sat with her head tucked between her knees. She was still experiencing some difficulty breathing but her hacking had stopped. Sensing my footsteps, she lifted her head.

Sitting down near Mother I said, "Well, I've informed her. She'll be here soon."

"Poor girl, she must have been alarmed," Mother said to herself, and then she asked me, "She didn't come with you?"

"She was serving her father his meal."

"What else could she do?" Mother said. "Her father is an invalid."

"Mother, who is Husna?"

"She's a nice young woman," she said. "She does needlework. A while back she came to take lessons from me."

"From you?" I was surprised, for no reason at all. "How come I never saw her here?"

Mother wanted to say something—perhaps “Well, what have you seen anyway”—but stopped short. Then she said, “You were in Allahabad at the time.”

“And what’s wrong with her father?”

“Paralysis of the legs, poor soul,” she replied. “You used to be quite fond of buying his toothpowder.”

“What toothpowder?”

“The same, Ladlay’s Badshahi Manjan [Royal Toothpowder].”

“Ladlay?” I asked, much surprised. “Is he still in Lucknow?”

“Worse than a corpse. Both of his legs have shriveled up.”

Just then there was a sound at the door and Husna entered. Since the veil of her burqa was raised, I recognized her. I marveled at the fact that she had arrived so expeditiously. Mother blossomed the minute she saw her. “Come, Daughter, come!” she said. “I knew you’d fly over to me.”

She proceeded slowly toward the *dalan* and I climbed up the stairs to the rooftop.

Watching the kites soar lazily in the receding afternoon sun I was struck by the realization that it had, perhaps, been years since I had bothered to lift my head and look up. At the moment, the clear blue sky and Ladlay’s name carried me back to my childhood, to a time when, besides the acrobats, the jugglers, and the man who caught only the most bizarre animals, there was also this Ladlay who drew me to the Sunday market at Nakhkhas. He would spread out a sheer by the side of the street and stand next to it. On the sheer, some fifty or sixty herbs were neatly laid out in small open-mouthed bags, and behind them, on the closed lid of a small box, were several rows of big and small bottles containing Badshahi Manjan. Ladlay himself stood behind his wares. He was a stocky man with even white teeth. Within a short time buyers would gather around him. Then he would speak. A strange excitement and grandeur swept over him when he spoke; nonetheless the speech itself never changed. For the first few minutes he spoke in English, or in some kind of gibberish he had cooked up himself but which nonetheless sounded like English to those who didn’t know any better. Then he would tell the people that he had studied in England and that, if he wanted to, he could become a Deputy Collector of Revenues that very day, but he preferred making his toothpowder to working as a Deputy Collector. And then, tapping each of the bags in turn with his cane, he described its contents with great facility, telling the effects of the ingredients and the incredible hazards that attended the effort to collect them. Next he picked up two bottles of his Badshahi Manjan and, clinking them together, explained how his

toothpowder contained all those ingredients and how its recipe was kept well guarded in the Royal Treasure House. Seriousness was so mixed with jocularity in his speech that people had a hard time deciding where to laugh and where not to. I used to be a bit frightened of him, nevertheless I eagerly awaited the moment when, just before launching into his sale's pitch, he would press a thick copper coin between his teeth and nearly bend it over with his thumb. Then he would pass the bent coin around for everyone to see. Some customers made vain attempts to straighten it. Eventually the coin was returned to Ladlay who would press it between his teeth as before and flatten it out. Thereafter the sale of the toothpowder would begin. I bought a small bottle of the stuff every second or third Sunday, used the powder regularly, and tried to straighten bent coins.

After a while my enthusiasm for the market waned. The market also was no longer what it used to be and I had stopped paying attention to whether Ladlay still sold his toothpowder there. Then I was packed off to Allahabad. When I returned to Lucknow after finishing my education I did go out once or twice to the Sunday market, but now it had become unbearably crowded. Finally I quit going past the Nakhkhas because its bazaar got in the way of my aimless wanderings.

I had forgotten this market of my childhood and its many attractions, including Ladlay, long ago, but at this moment, when kites were calling out and circling slowly in the blue expanse of the sky, and downstairs Ladlay's daughter was talking with my mother, I could vividly see that market and Ladlay standing in it—why, I could even see the coin which he had bent between his teeth.

It was late afternoon when Mother called to me from downstairs. I went down and took a seat beside her. She was sitting on her bed and looked more or less well. The pieces of embroidered material were gone from the chowki, replaced by a tray of fresh, warm food.

"Eat," Mother said, "I've starved my son today."

"That ... Husna ... she's left?" I asked.

"The poor girl cooked all this and then went home."

Going over to sit on the chowki I said, "You come too. Or shall I bring the food over to you?"

"No, she had me eat before she left."

After a couple of morsels I realized that I was eating Mother's cooking. When I couldn't hold back any longer, I asked, "Did you also teach Husna how to cook?"

"What a perfect guess," Mother said feeling pleased. "Yes, when she used to come for embroidery lessons ... I told her, 'Daughter, why not learn cooking too,'" and then Mother said again, "What a perfect guess."

"Why? I can pick out my mother's cooking from a thousand dishes."

Mother laughed softly, and then recalling something she said, "Tell me, what exactly did you say to Husna?"

"Just that you weren't feeling well."

"And?"

"And? Yes, that you'd asked for her."

"And then you took off without telling her who you were?"

I realized my mistake.

"Yes, now that you mention it," I said. "She didn't ask me. And besides I was in a hurry to get back home."

"You shouldn't be so jittery, boy."

"Then how did she ..."

"She figured it out herself and came over."

I had the feeling that Mother had brought this up just to have me ask a certain question, so I put that question to her, "But how did she recognize me?"

"From your shirt," Mother said, rather proudly.

I looked at my shirt. It was quite worn, but Mother had embroidered a very intricate floral vine on it herself, not a single stitch of which had loosened from its place even now. I ran my hand over the vine and asked, "She recognized your needlework, didn't she? But what made her think I was ..."

But the answer dawned on me before I had even finished the question. There was only one way a man of my modest means could be wearing a shirt with such fine embroidery and that was if he was the son of the one who had done that embroidery. It was a matter anyone could figure out and so Husna had too.

Mother looked at me intently and started to say something but stopped. When I was done eating, she said, "Put the dirty dishes by the well. I'll wash them."

"No, let me," I said, standing up. "Where are your dishes?"

"She did them and put them away," Mother told me. "And listen ..."

I stopped on my way to the well.

"Yes, what is it?"

"She'll come again tomorrow at noon. Try to be here."

"Why?"

"She has some business with you."

"With me?"

"Yes. She wants you to read something for her."

The next day Husna came to Mother a little after noon. I got up and went toward the well. The two talked by themselves for quite a while and then Mother called me.

She was lying on the bed. Husna was sitting near her on the edge of the bed. She looked my age, or maybe a little younger. She had regular features and her face bore a faint resemblance to her father's. Observing all this in one glance, I pushed aside the piece of embroidery on the chowki and sat down. I also noticed that at some point Mother had embroidered all the pieces left over from yesterday and that some fresh pieces to be embroidered had been added. Just then Mother said, "Here," and she held out a sealed envelope toward me. Sitting on the chowki, I also extended my hand and took hold of the envelope, flipping it back and forth to look at it.

"It's sealed," I told Mother.

Mother looked at Husna. She made some sign, and Mother said, "You may open it. Her father has given it to her."

I opened the envelope. On the cream-colored paper inside the following was written with a broad-tipped pen:

This document is on behalf of Ali Muhammad, alias Ladlay, son of Ali Husain, alias Dulare Navab, resident of Peepal Tree House, Chowk, City of Lucknow. Though of sound health, I have grown old, an age when a man begins to feel closer to death. I am, therefore, leaving this testament.

Let it be known that I earned my living in weekly markets. I sold Badshahi Manjan in three separate markets; Pahari Oil for pain, injury and impotence in two; and performed magic acts in one. On the seventh day I rested.

I have only one daughter, Musammat Husna, who will become 30 this winter. She was going on 15 when my legs became useless and now, for the past 15 years, she has been supporting me through her earnings from chikan embroidery. Inasmuch as she is my only child, whatever I own legally belongs to her. However, the purpose of this document is not to reiterate this fact, but to declare that nothing from my belongings kept in the wooden chest are to be given to my daughter. Nonetheless, every single one of those belongings must be shown to her so that she will know what she has not received.

Signed, Ali Muhammad, alias Ladlay, written in his own hand.

After I finished reading the document I looked at Husna. "This is his will."

"Will?" she asked, a little taken aback. Then she thought of something, looking perplexed.

"It's about his belongings."

"His belongings?" she asked looking at Mother, and became even more perplexed.

"Read it aloud," Mother told me.

I started to read out loud. Coming to the Pahari Oil I hesitated a little, then, skipping it, I continued to read on. After I'd finished, I folded the sheet and put it back in the envelope. I gave the envelope to Mother and then walked over to the well in the courtyard. I was marveling at the fact that this piece of writing belonged to the man who used to sell Badshahi Manjan at Nakhkhas and who used to frighten me a little. I also felt a desire to see the contents of the wooden chest which Husna was not to receive, and to see Ladlay writing something.

I saw Husna leaving. I stood up, but just as I was going over to Mother a couple of neighbor women came in, so I again sat down at the well. The neighborhood women had started to call on Mother more frequently the past several days. They helped her with the household chores. Mother seemed well now but her hand trembled quite a bit. Even so, when I came over to her after the women had left, I saw her sitting in bed embroidering. She glanced up at me once and continued with her work. I thought she would want to talk about Ladlay's will, but she didn't open her mouth at all. After watching her pass her needle through the piece for some time, I said, "Mother, your hand is trembling badly."

She didn't respond. I sat down near her on the chowki. For a long time I looked at the embroidered pieces, flipping through them until sunset arrived. Mother bundled the pieces and, after putting them aside, she looked at me. "Today is Thursday," she told me.

"I know," I said. "Where are the marches and the lamp?"

On my way back from the cemetery I roamed around for a while before going home. When I did get back I saw that Mother had already gone to sleep and that my meal was laid out on the chowki. Shortly after eating, I also went to sleep.

Mother had already finished all the pieces well before noon the next day. She cooked food, gave it to me to eat, and then said, "Son, will you do something for me?"

"What?"

She bundled up the pieces, gave the bundle to me, and said, "Take this to Husna. She'll take it over to the Lala's."

"I know where the Lala's shop is. I can take it over," I said.

"No, no," Mother interjected hurriedly. "You take it to Husna. She has to also get some fresh work for me."

"I can bring that too."

"The account also has to be settled," she said, and then she again said, "Listen ..."

I listened to her. Once again I went to the Peepal Tree House and tapped on the door with the knocker. Again the same male voice said, "Coming."

But it was a very old woman who answered the door. She peered at me as though trying to recognize me. Without trying to recognize her I said, "I've brought this stuff over."

"What stuff?"

"Chikan embroidery," I said. "It's to be taken to the Lala's shop."

"All right, wait here," she said, and went inside. Returning shortly she said, "Come in, he's calling you."

The small *dorab* led into an unpaved courtyard. There was a thatched roof on one side, a *dalan* on the other, and a scraggly hedge of henna on the third. Behind the hedge were two small, rusted tin roofs with curtains of sackcloth hanging from them. The woman led me into the *dalan*. There, after so many years, I saw Ladlay.

He was half-lying and half-sitting on a bamboo-framed bed. I didn't notice any significant change in him except that his hair, entirely black before, now had the reddish gloss of dye. I glanced at his legs but they were covered with an old blanket.

"Sit down, Mian," he said after acknowledging my greetings. "Put that thing over there."

The old woman took the bundle from my hands and put it on the wooden chest in the corner of the *dalan*. Then, pointing at a *chowki*, she said, "Make yourself comfortable, Brother."

I sat down on the *chowki* and looked at Ladlay.

"Birya has gone to the hospital," he informed me. "She said that you would be coming. Do you want to leave a message for her?"

"Just that she should bring back fresh work," I said, "and that the account . . ."

"I'll tell her. Everything will be taken care of," he said, and then he told the old woman, "His mother taught our Birya chikan embroidery."

"Don't I know that?" the woman said. "I took her there myself several times."

"You're absolutely right," Ladlay said.

He chatted with me for a while, mostly about the art of chikan embroidery and my education. He spoke softly and calmly, and his conversation was very refined. I realized that I couldn't converse with such polish. Finally I got up to leave.

"Birya's been gone for quite a while," he said. "You can wait a while longer if you like. She should be back any minute now."

"No," I said. "I have a lot of work to do."

Before he could ask, "Mian, what do you do?" I said salaam and walked out of the *dalan*, his voice trailing after me, "Please do give Sister my regards."

I was feeling pleased with myself for having evaded Ladlay's question. But by the time I reached the Chowk it occurred to me that he should have asked me that question when he was inquiring about my education. A few more strides down the road I became convinced that he already knew the answer to that question. Husna must have told him. "But who would have told Husna?" I asked myself, and then answered myself, "Mother, obviously."

Sorry for myself, I felt angry toward Mother. By the time I reached home, I had made up my mind to have it out with Mother. I'd even decided how to proceed: "Mother, what's this? First, you don't let me do anything, then you go about complaining to the whole world that I don't work."

But I didn't get a chance to carry out my plan. Mother had died shortly before I reached home. Perhaps she'd been struck by paralysis, or maybe it was a heart attack. Before dying she was only able to tell a neighbor woman where she kept the money.

Everything that followed from that point on seems like a dream. I vaguely remember that women gathered inside the house and men outside, and

that I was doing whatever I was being told to do. I had taken the money from the place Mother had indicated and, without counting it, had given it to one of the men. Accompanying the bier to the cemetery, the fog lifted briefly from my mind and I complained that Mother was not being buried next to Father. I was told no empty space could be found around his grave.

Starting the next day, women began to visit my house to offer their condolences. Most of them were burqa-clad women who did *chikan* embroidery. I didn't know any of them so I just sat quietly on the *chowki* while the neighbor women talked with them. I had no interest in their conversation, but it did surprise me a little that so many women knew Mother and that the news of her passing had reached them so quickly.

The neighbors sent me food for the next three days. Husna also showed up on the fourth day with several women in tow. After talking with the neighbor women for a while, she came and stood near me. I kept sitting with my head down for some time and then I lifted it up to look at her.

"Please go over to the Lala's shop," she said. "He's asked for you."

"He's asked for me?"

"He said it was something important. Besides, some money matters need to be settled."

"When is he at the shop?"

"All the time," she said, and after a pause, "I tried to come that day, but ..."

Without caring to finish the sentence, and pulling her veil back over her face, she left along with the other women.

That night food was sent over from someone's house but I sent it back. I recalled that on the day of Mother's death I had taken out her money and handed it over to somebody and he had returned the remainder when we got back from the cemetery. He had also accounted for the expenses, but I hadn't paid attention. I took that money out from under the pillow and I had just started counting it when a neighbor woman came in with the food I'd returned. I had played in her lap as a child and called her *Khala* [Aunt]. It was she Mother had asked to swear on her oath the night of the riots to make sure that I ate my food. Now the same *Khala* was asking me to eat on my oath. I said I would eat in the bazaar, but she considered all bazaar food poison. We kept going back and forth for quite a while. At long last I pulled the money out from under my pillow, gave it to her and somehow made her agree that she would arrange for my meals with that money in the future. She left, but only after I'd

eaten. For the first time since Mother's death I felt a sense of ease and, because of it, I felt my loss of her more fully.

The next day I went to see the Lala.

It was a big shop with two doors. The Lala's two sons were minding the business. There was a constant flow of workers, male as well as female. The Lala sat a short distance away from these people on a low takht, with a bolster behind him. He was a very immaculate old man. His eyebrows had started to turn grey. In front of him he had a small box with a bundle of papers on it which he was rummaging through. I went and stood in front of him. After a while he raised his head and gave me a look. I greeted him and said, "You sent for me."

The Lala glanced at me a few times sizing me up, then with great courtesy he said, "Come, Brother, come. Come over here."

I took a seat next him on a corner of the takht. He told me that he had heard of Mother's death from Husna, adding, "What can I say, Brother, it's like my hands have been chopped off."

He talked about Mother for quite a while and praised her work. He also asked me about the details of Mother's illness and her burial. And then he turned his attention to the papers. After some time he raised his head and said, "Yes, I did send for you. For one thing, I wanted to settle the account." He removed the papers from on top of the box, opened it, took out some cash and putting it in front of me said, "These are her earnings from the last few days before she died. Put it aside, but count it first Brother."

It was not a large sum by any means. I picked it up and counted it. The Lala signaled for me not to leave, meanwhile taking from the box another sum wrapped inside a handkerchief. He held it out to me.

"No, Lala," I said, getting up. "I have money."

"This too is your money, Brother. I'm not giving you anything extra," the Lala said. "She saved some money with me now and then in your name. It was not possible to save any at home so she asked me to put something aside from her wages."

I looked at the handkerchief, then at him. "But Lala, this seems like too much."

"Small sums add up to a lot eventually," the Lala remarked. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say." He pointed at the handkerchief, "Take some time to get over your grief. When the money begins to run low, come back to me. I'll give you work."

"Lala, I don't know embroidery," I said, "Mother didn't teach me."

"We'll have somebody teach you," he said, "or we'll find you some other work. You have to do something or other now. And we also need somebody we can trust."

Then he became lost in thought. I was unable to decide whether to stay or leave. Meanwhile the Lala started again, "It was just like a game. Sometimes I would say, 'Sister, put your son to some work. How long will he roam around idly?' Sometimes she herself would ask, 'Lala, find some kind of work for my son. How much longer will he have to stay idle?' But whatever work I suggested she considered demeaning. I would respond by saying, 'It's just this kind of humble work that makes one rise. How long did I myself have to comb through the lanes lugging a huge bundle on my shoulder and a yardstick in my hand? And didn't my throat become hoarse from hawking?' She would say, 'You're absolutely right, Lala. But the boy's father was planning to send him to England. Now if he were to go peddling in the streets would that give comfort to a departed soul in his grave?'"

The Lala kept repeating such things for a long time. Perhaps he had gotten into the habit of talking a lot. Finally he tired and I got up. He picked up the handkerchief and handed it to me. Asking me to come closer, he patted me on the head and then ran his hand over the embroidery on my shirt. "We won't get to see such fine work anymore," he said, his head bowing in respect and remaining bowed for quite a while. As I turned around to leave, he lifted his head and said, "All right, Brother, go now and get over your grief."

After my visit to the Lala's, I started to light a lamp on Mother's grave every Thursday along with Father's. The rest of the time I just wandered around. At that time it was the only way that I knew of getting over my grief.

5

Without even opening the Lala's handkerchief, I handed it over to Khala next door. I told her emphatically not to forget to let me know when the money was about to run out. I asked her about the money every few days and each time she said that there was still plenty. She would also give some account of the expenses for food, never failing to round it all off with, "An amount the size of an ant's egg, that's how much you eat. What expenses could there be."

This prompted me to laugh, and then I'd go out to wander around some more.

One Thursday I was returning home via the Chowk. Thursday was the day the bazaar remained closed and there was nothing for me to see there. But as I passed by the firecrackers shop my feet began to slow down. On the wooden board at the front of the closed shop sat Ladlay, all alone, his feet dangling. I thought he wouldn't be able to recognize me so I kept walking, but when he saw me he shook his head in such a way that I had to stop. I greeted him and asked, "How are you?"

"Just so," he replied, then he pointed at his legs.

Above the board he looked like a fairly stout man, but below his waist his emaciated legs hung down from the board like a pair of dried up sticks. Although Mother had told me about his condition, it was still painful to look at him now. I was at a loss for what to say to him, so I just stood quietly gazing at him while he stared at his sturdy staff which was leaning against the board.

"I learnt about Sister," he spoke after some time. "I wanted to be part of the funeral procession, to be present at her burial."

"No, how could you have gone in your condition?"

"We are indebted to her for her many favors," he said and then, out of the blue, he popped *that* question, "Mian, what do you do now?"

So you're asking me this *now* Ladlay? I said in my heart, and simply lied to him, "I'm working at the Lala's."

I had even thought of what I would tell him if he asked me about the kind of work I did. Instead, he asked, "What do you do at home?"

"I fret," I answered. "That's why I wander around all day long."

"Yes, walking around must distract you a little," he said. He didn't ask when, precisely, I worked at the Lala's if I spent my entire day wandering around.

"How are you?" I asked again.

"I'm the same as before, but Bitya has left us," he said and hung his head.

I couldn't grasp his words right away. Before I could ask him, he volunteered himself, "She had come down with jaundice."

I sat down beside him on the board.

"When did this happen?" I asked. "No one told me."

"Who could have gone to tell you," he said and became silent.

There was so much I wanted to ask him but didn't know quite where to begin. So I thought it best to stay with him a while longer and then take my leave.

When he saw that I was about to leave, he started to say something, but stopped. He tried again and stopped again. I, too, stopped in my tracks.

"What is it?" I asked.

He kept scratching the head of his staff with his fingernail, then proceeded hesitantly, "Mian, will you help me a little?"

This was bound to happen, Ladlay—I said in my heart. But I had no money on me at the moment, so I said hesitantly, "Yes, what is it?"

"I've got some stuff. Will you keep it at your place? Just a small box. It won't take up much room."

Saying this he slid down from the top of the board. I leapt to help him but by then he had already planted his elbows on the board. With his elbows still in that position he grabbed his staff and, lowering himself ever so slowly onto the ground, sat down on his haunches. His henna-dyed head rose slightly above his dried up legs as he started to move forward in that position. I was standing behind him, watching how his head and shoulders swayed by turns to the right and to the left, like someone inebriated. To see him move this way was even more painful than seeing him sitting on the board. Perhaps he knew that too, for when he reached the opening of the lane he stopped, twisted his neck and said, "You go on ahead; I'll be there shortly."

I felt relieved and started to walk fast until I reached the Peepal Tree House and stopped at the door. After quite a while I saw him coming. He was very out of breath by the time he reached me. He sat on the door's ledge for a while and then said, "I've put you through a lot of trouble, Mian."

The door was closed. He pushed on one of the panels with his shoulder. The door creaked faintly and opened. He put his staff to one side and picked up his withered legs with both of his hands, placing them on the door ledge as though they belonged to someone else. For a moment I actually thought that he would stand up, leaving the legs and the staff lying on the ledge. Instead, he grabbed the staff and, still moving along on his haunches, entered the *dewbi*. He turned back to look at me and said, "Come on in, Mian, I won't keep you long."

I had not seen Husna in this house, but nonetheless I felt her absence. The chowki in the dalan resembled the one on which Mother used to sit and do her embroidery. Ladlay was sitting on the floor, one of his hands resting on the chowki.

"I'm giving you a lot of trouble, Mian," he said, starting to inch his way toward a big wooden chest sitting in a corner of the dalan. When he

had come near it, he put his hand on the lid and looked at me. The lid came to slightly above his shoulder. I asked, "You want it opened?"

"Yes. I'll try."

It wasn't possible to lift that heavy lid unless one stood at one's full height. So I moved forward and opened it.

"Look inside. Do you see bottles on the right hand side?"

"Yes, they're there," I said. "Shall I take them out?"

"May you live long."

The chest contained plenty of other stuff as well. There was a large enamel bowl filled with such unsightly-looking creatures as snakes, scorpions and chameleons, carved out of some dark-colored wood. Long-bladed knives, chains, cooking pots and the like lay on another side. I had seen this kind of paraphernalia with those who put on magic shows at the Nakhkhas. These things also reminded me that somebody used to sell Magic Oil in the same bazaar. That man also kept the same types of scorpions and snakes in an enameled vessel, all drenched in the Magic Oil. But I, like many other people, took these creatures to be alive and thought that the Magic Oil was actually squeezed out of them. The seller also made this claim.

I took out all the bottles of Badshahi Manjan and set them in front of Ladlay. The bags of herbs could also be seen inside one open bundle. I took the bundle out carefully and set it beside the bottles. Ladlay gave me a surprised look, and then, saying "May you live long," he undid the bundle fully, removed a few bags and looked at the mildew that had formed on the herbs. He shook his head in disappointment. Then he put the bags back into the bundle and tied it securely. When I was returning the bundle to the chest, I spotted the copper coins, some of which were still bent. I took the coins out and gave them to Ladlay. Placing one bent and one unbent coin on his palm he thought for a while, then extended his palm toward me and said, "Put these back too, Mian, I don't need them either."

After closing the chest I turned toward him. He quickly counted the bottles and then said to me, "I've really put you through a lot of trouble today."

"No, it's all right," I said, and then asked, "So you want me to keep these bottles for you, is that all? And their case?"

"The case is up there. I'll have somebody bring it down for me," he said, pointing at the wall in back of the chest.

As quickly as I had recognized the bottles of Badshahi Manjan, I also recognized the small case that lay on a shelf several arm's lengths above the chest.

"I'll take it down," I said.

Since the chest stood in the way, I found it difficult to reach the case with both hands, so I pulled on the case with one hand while supporting it from below with the other and managed to bring it down. I put it in front of Ladlay. He wiped it with his hand and removed the lid. It was filled with what looked like snippets of cloth. He stared at them in silence for a while and then took them out, putting them on top of the chest's lid until the case was empty. He was now putting the bottles in the case, one by one. I gave a fleeting glance at the bits of cloth. Nearly every one of them had some chikan embroidery on it. I picked one up and examined it. A delicate floral design, nearly embroidered with white thread, appeared at the very top, with some half a dozen copies of it embroidered by a novice's hand below. One after another, I picked up pieces of cloth and gave them a look. They all had specimens of different chikan embroidery. Each with a sample by a master hand at the top, followed by its crude and not-so-crude copies. I stared at them in silence and then I became aware of Ladlay's presence. By then he had already placed the bottles in the case and had put the lid back on, and he had been gazing at me for God knows how long. When I looked at him, he lifted up one hand and reached for the cloth cuttings. Then he tapped the lid of the chest and said, "Maybe we should return them to the chest now."

Sitting the way he was, he struggled with one hand and managed to lift the lid just a little while he attempted to sweep up the cuttings with his other hand.

"Here, let me do it," I said, lifting the lid some more and putting the cuttings into the corner of the chest vacated by the bottles. Then I turned towards Ladlay. Resting his elbows on the floor behind his dried up legs which were stretched out in front of him, he was half-sitting and half-lying and seemed to be dozing. I asked him, "Is that all?"

"Nakhkhas is closer to where you live. Every Sunday I'll come and pick this up from your place and bring it back in the evening. But if it would inconvenience you too much ..."

"No trouble at all."

"So then, I'll bring the case over to you by this evening."

"You don't have to," I said. "I'll take it along."

"No, Mian, it doesn't look nice that you should carry my burden."

"It's not that heavy," I said, picking up the case. "I can hardly feel it."

"I'm really very embarrassed, Mian."

"What's there to be embarrassed about?" I said. "All right, you're sure there isn't anything more you'd like me to do?"

"How much I've troubled you today," he said, gathering his outstretched legs with his hands, and then he sat down supporting himself with his staff.

"Well then," I said, turning toward the courtyard. "I'll be at home on Sunday."

"Hang on, Mian. I'm coming too."

I stopped and asked, "Where do you want to go?"

"Just as far as the door, to see you off."

"No need to. You stay here. I'll see myself out."

It occurred to me after I came out that I hadn't offered him my sympathies over his daughter's death, but at the same time it also occurred to me that he himself hadn't given me a chance to. So I didn't turn back.

After depositing the case under Mother's chowki at home, I headed straight for the Lala's shop, but, it being a Thursday, it was closed. I returned home. After that I only went out to go to the cemetery.

The next day I went to the Lala and told him that I was pretty much over my grief. The Lala took me into his employ the same day. When I inquired about my work, he said he'd let me know later.

Ladlay didn't show up on Sunday. He didn't show up the next Sunday either. I waited for him the whole day. In the evening I went over to his house. The lower latch of the door had a padlock on it. When I asked his neighbors, I was told that he was seen going out last Sunday morning and that he had not come back since. They had made inquiries about him here and there, but nobody had the foggiest idea where to look for him.

No one tried very hard to look for him either. By and large his neighbors were almost certain that he had gone to some other city and must be begging there. □

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

Custody*

I

THERE'S NO LONGER ANYONE around now who can even tell what exactly was sold at Nauroz's Shop. It can be surmised though, on the basis of a few scattered oral traditions and some true or false stories, that when this town was just a small hamlet, Nauroz's Shop had already been in existence for quite a long time. Back then it was right in the middle of the community so the residents of the hamlet could pretty much buy whatever was needed there. If this was really the case, one might also surmise that it was the hamlet's only shop in those days.

It remained in operation for several generations, and in each generation the owner's name remained Nauroz. Even though he had a different name before taking over the shop, after taking it over everyone called him Nauroz, probably because the shop was called Nauroz's Shop. These people had some genetically inherited condition which caused every Nauroz to eventually lose his mind. When this happened to one Nauroz, another Nauroz took his place at the shop, losing his own mind in turn, followed by another Nauroz who worked there until he also lost his mind. This continuing streak of madness was considered to be the result of some curse. People who believed in this sometimes got into spirited discussions about whether the curse was on the shop, the owners of the shop, or the appellation "Nauroz."

When a Nauroz would stop showing up at the shop, one knew he'd gone mad. But there was also one Nauroz who clung to the shop even

*"Tehsil," from the author's third collection *Tu'la-Caman ki Maina* (Karachi: Aj ki Kitabhan, 1997), pp. 95-137.

after losing his mind, with the result that within a few days the shop itself began to look crazy. I belong to the time of that Nauroz.

At first, nobody suspected that that Nauroz had gone mad. Although, if they had given it some thought, it wasn't something that was hard to figure out, because, in a matter of just a few days, the shop's condition became such that when it opened one day it would be chockful of clay toys. The next day it would be filled with domestic birds, and it was selling their meat on still another day. One would see herbal plants on one day and piles of firewood on another. But instead of suspecting that something was the matter with Nauroz's mind, people became fascinated by the changing merchandise, indeed to such an extent that they started betting among themselves about what item was likely to be on sale the next day when the shop opened. Only when this fascination had spread like an epidemic did some people, who had repeatedly lost their bets, suspect—the suspicion itself spreading like an epidemic—that Nauroz had gone crazy. Then it became a routine that people would gather outside the shop every morning and, when it opened and its curtain was lifted up, they would distribute among themselves whatever merchandise could be had and they would leave wherever they thought its price was on top of the high takht with heavy posts, in a corner of which Nauroz sat huddled.

One day, when the curtain was lifted, Nauroz couldn't be found anywhere. The takht was empty and two baby girls, who hadn't yet learned to sit properly, were playing with two clay balls on the floor. Naturally, this became the talk of the town. And also, naturally again, neither the girls nor the clay balls, which were perhaps their toys, were considered the shop's merchandise. So, it could be said that that was the first day Nauroz's shop had nothing at all to sell.

After searching unsuccessfully for Nauroz people began to look for somebody who could take care of the girls, because, so far, they had remained unclaimed. People also looked for a new Nauroz. The absent Nauroz did have a brother, but he was already mad and, according to some, mad since birth. Even so, he was brought in and repeatedly made to sit on the shop's takht, but, each time, he fled the minute the opportunity presented itself, finally disappearing altogether one day like his brother had done earlier. During this time the girls stayed with me because I used to live above Nauroz's shop and one of the staircases to my place started inside the shop. Also, nobody else agreed to raise them.

And, although the shop was no longer in business, people had meanwhile also started calling me Nauroz. Then, one day, I took stock of the shop.

The shop became visible immediately upon reaching the last bend in the road which ran along the edge of the jungle by the ruins. In place of a door it had a heavy curtain which was raised onto two bamboo poles like a canopy during business hours. At that time, from a distance, it sometimes looked like a child who had just woken up and was yawning, and sometimes it looked like a ferocious animal opening its mouth before making a sound. I was interested in both of these similarities and occasionally, in moments when my mind was wandering, I would think about them.

The shop's floor was somewhat lower than the ground outside. The space inside the shop was much bigger than that of any other shop in town. Its high walls had compartments and shelves in several places, or thick wooden pegs and heavy iron hooks. There were also many criss-crossing rope webbing that were tied to these hooks. Bamboo poles and chains hung from the rafters with hooks on either end. In many places the floor also had recessed compartments of various sizes which had been reinforced with bricks and then covered over with fitted boards. Brass rings were attached to these boards for lifting them up. There were also brass rings in quite a few places on the unpaved floor, but there were no compartments beneath them. I pulled these rings up one by one and examined them closely but detected no movement around them. Just foolishness—I thought; then I counted these pointless rings. Could it be, I wondered, that their number corresponded to the number of generations that had run Nauroz's Shop? I examined the entire shop again. Wall compartments, floor compartments, pegs, webbing, bamboo poles and chains suspended from the ceiling, all manner of empty jars and baskets lying about on the floor—they all revealed that the shop had seen many generations, but they gave no clue as to what object or group of objects was, in fact, sold there.

I sat down on a corner of the *takht* with the heavy posts which the last Nauroz used to sit on before his disappearance. Although bereft of saleable merchandise, the shop still looked so full that it was impossible to move about in it freely. As I continued sitting on the corner of the *takht*, I felt that all the objects scattered around me were more precious than the merchandise that had been sold here. But, I would not, I resolved, let a single one of these objects be sold, at least not as long as I'm called Nauroz. Meanwhile, I remembered the original intent with which I had come to examine the shop. Once again I looked at each and every object and finally felt assured that there was nothing here that could possibly harm small children. I climbed the staircase inside the shop returning to

my place where both girls had by now woken up. The minute they saw me they both started pushing themselves toward me, but without making any noise.

They had now learned to sit. In fact, for several days already they had even started to crawl forward a bit as they sat, only to fall down after going a distance of one or two lengths of the hand. I sort of liked the way they tumbled over silently and remained silent after falling. I sometimes sat them up and started to back away slowly, snapping my fingers. They would crawl forward with their eyes fixed on my hand and eventually tilt to one side and fall. This was my only game with them up to now. After playing with them for a little while I would pick them up and carry them downstairs to the shop. There, I sat them on the unpaved floor and, all of a sudden, they would come to life as though a fish's young had been released into water. After pushing their tiny bodies toward everything at first, one started off in the direction of the jars while the other aimed for a basket. They only went a short distance and then both toppled over on their sides, picked themselves up again and moved, then again fell back down. This time though, as one of them tried to raise herself, her eyes fell on the hooks hanging from the ceiling. In trying to reach for them she fell on her back on the soft dirt floor. I picked her up and sat her down. Then I brought a basket over to her. The other girl had come upon the ring handle of a board and was trying to eat it. I sat her beside the basket too and one of them got involved with it. At that point I looked at them closely. Their faces and bodies were so similar that they could be considered twin sisters. The thought struck me that I might have given water, etc., twice over to just one of them on several occasions. Only after a close and protracted inspection could I perceive some slight difference in their features, but what stood in the way of identifying each of them individually was their eyes. Their eyes were absolutely identical.

These belonged to a race I wasn't familiar with. I even thought that eyes such as these were only seen in paintings, although, unlike the eyes in a painting, soft lights seemed to glimmer somewhere deep inside of them. After watching them for some time it occurred to me that I had absolutely no connection with these girls and I had been made responsible for them for no reason at all. As a result, some of my habits had been changed and certain routines had pretty much been done away with. I realized that because of these girls I had had to stop going to the jungle, or even observing it sitting inside my quarters. So I thought, in fact I

more or less decided, to keep them at Nauroz's house which I could see clearly from my place. This was a small, old but strongly-constructed building that stood a little ways from the shop and it was where Nauroz had lived with his brother. I'd never gone there, and even Nauroz himself had never spent much time there. I remembered him. As long as he had remained of sound mind, he had routinely closed the shop at sundown and walked off toward some place outside of town. He would return late at night, sometimes even the next day, empty-handed or with some merchandise for the shop. Besides his brother, he had no relatives, at least not in this town where he had his shop. His dealings with the townsfolk didn't go beyond what was required by the business, and with me they were even less. Nevertheless, I looked over his accounts now and then, and he had given me the space above his shop to live in. He sometimes wandered in there of his own accord, but it never seemed that he had come to see me, so I didn't attempt to talk with him much. Still we did converse a little and then he addressed me as Saasaan, informing me that that was my family name. He always took a place near the window which stood directly above the entrance to the shop. If he spotted an approaching customer from there, he immediately got up and went quickly down the inner staircase, arriving in the shop before the customer.

My own favorite place to sit was by this same window because the trees in the jungle by the ruins were clearly visible from that vantage point.

I sensed a faint glimmer of those trees before my eyes and realized that I had actually been staring at the girls' eyes this entire time. They had stopped playing with the basket and were feeling frightened watching me staring at them so intently. When I straightened up, they started to crawl toward me with halting steps, their frightened eyes still glued to me. I felt that even though they were frightened of me, they still wanted to rush over to me. I took a few steps backwards; they started to crawl faster. Before they tumbled over, I lunged forward and picked the two of them up together. Their tiny hearts were racing. I succeeded in making them smile, but only after a long time.

I had no experience with raising children. Nonetheless I was raising them, somehow or other. At first I had thought that the people who lived in the area around the shop, whom I knew quite well, would help make my job

easier. Because I read and wrote for them, they cared for me a lot and were also quite mindful of my needs. But when I brought up the subject of the girls around them a few times, they took off in other directions.

One day a nice breeze was blowing so I took the girls out as far as the bend in the road. After playing with them on the soft grass at the edge of the road for a while I was taking them back when I saw four or five important townsmen standing in front of the shop's curtain. I asked about a few ordinary things, to which they gave cursory answers and then became silent. They remained silent for quite a while. Then one of them, without pointing at the girls, said, "Nauroz, don't bring them out."

"Why, is something wrong with that?" I asked.

"Not really, but ..." he said, "Who knows who they are."

"Why," I asked, "couldn't he have had daughters?"

"Daughters?" he said. "Then why did he abandon them?"

"He had gone mad."

"So does every Nauroz, Nauroz. But even a mad man ..."

After that all of them stared at me for a long time without speaking.

"Even so," I said finally, "is there something wrong with bringing them out?"

"Who knows who they are?"

"No one has come forward to claim them?"

"None at all," he said. "But does that mean there isn't any claimant?"

"I'm taking care of them," I said, "all by myself, and I think their claimant is Nauroz."

"Which Nauroz?"

Several answers came as far as my lips and stopped. All of them, perhaps expecting an answer, had their eyes fixed on me.

"All right," I had to say, "From now on I won't bring them out."

That very day I removed the curtain from the shop's entrance and installed a regular door in its place, making doubly sure that it could be closed from both inside and out. The townsfolk helped me a lot in this, just as they always had in everything else.

After making sure the door was secure I decided, first of all, to make a visit to the jungle by the ruins.

I used to go there fairly regularly, almost daily, before Nauroz's disappearance. I did this to survey the interior of the jungle, but mostly I ended up just enjoying the sights of the ruins, though not completely, since they couldn't be seen clearly because of the tremendous density of

the trees. The trees' serpentine growth along the stone balconies that were drooping over dilapidated columns made it well-nigh impossible to determine the true form and character of their crooked trunks or their cracked bark. The vines, running recklessly here and there, going up and down trees, brought to mind children playing in the garden of a home and prompted a person to touch them involuntarily. Sometimes these vines seemed to be laughing and crying without even breaking the silence of the jungle. Dense straw bushes, sprouting from the dirt which stuck to the surface of the rocks, soared higher and higher, while the aerial roots of ancient trees seemed in need of help struggling to find a way to the soil through the crevices in the rocks.

It was impossible to gauge the dimensions of the exterior of the jungle from this vantage point, but the window above Nauruz's Shop where I sat—and Nauruz as well—did offer a clear view of the jungle's treetops, so there one could get some idea of the jungle's outward form, at least someone who had also seen the jungle from the inside while wandering through the ruins.

This wasn't a real jungle, just a cluster of old trees and wild bushes growing through the crevices of the ruins' massive walls, whose exact height or depth it was impossible to ascertain. Wherever the crown of one tree was found, the root of another tree started up in a crevice nearby. More trees grew in the lower area, taking on bizarre forms in order to escape from the shade of the trees growing in the areas up above. These lower trees went straight up for some distance, then bent to one side and continued along parallel to the ground, and then straightened up again after passing the perimeters of the shade. To the eye, this multi-storied jungle looked like the garden in a scenic photograph which had wrinkled in several places. When the wind blew quickly, the fluttering sound of paper, like the pages of a book being rifflled, could be heard. But when the wind changed into a dust storm, the sounds of the jungle also changed, frightening the townsfolk at night. Strange noises rose and fell in the fluctuating gusts of the storm and a man could, if he used his imagination, find similarities to other sounds. Perhaps the townspeople did just that. Why, without trying even I heard cackles, sobs, laughter, cries of joy and pain, reprimands and laments in the sounds of the jungle on several occasions while I was sitting by the window above Nauruz's Shop.

Sometimes, right in the middle of these sounds, suddenly a sound as if somebody was screaming something could also be heard. This may have been the sound of large limbs snapping and their barks splitting. At least I

thought so. But people spun stories about that sound. These stories had been circulating for generations and were perhaps as old as Nauroz's Shop. Each story invariably ended with the sound definitely being heard just before the onset of madness in a Nauroz. Nobody could ever figure out what the sound said, but it was rumored that every owner of Nauroz's Shop understood it sometime or other, after which he stopped taking care of the shop and went mad, or went mad and stopped taking care of the shop.

However, this sound was not heard by the Nauroz of my time—the one just prior to me. Several times, of course, the sound was heard and no Nauroz lost his head, but the townsfolk maintained that this was the first time a Nauroz had ever lost his head without the sound being heard. Perhaps this was why people at first didn't think that he had gone mad.

That day I didn't enjoy my excursion in the jungle and came out rather quickly, yet it was evening by the time I reached home. When I went down the inner stairs I found the shop dark and still. I strained my ears and detected the sound of breathing. Standing by the staircase, I snapped my fingers a few times and strained my eyes to see two tiny blurred figures crawling toward me. A short while later I felt the touch of their slender fingers on my shins. Before long their arms were wrapped around my knees. And so, holding onto me, they stood up for the first time ever.

In a few days they'll be running around, I thought, and carried them upstairs. From that very day I started to have them sit with me by the window. The season of strong winds had just set in. With their painting-like eyes they could see the trees of the jungle swaying from side to side and they felt happy hearing the flutter coming from them. When, however, the wind became a gusting dust storm for the first time, they became frightened. But I didn't take them away from the window. In a little while they started to listen to the strange new sounds of the jungle with even greater interest. Apart from those occasions, I usually kept them down in the shop and listened to them play, laugh or shout from my quarters. When their noises started to grow faint, I understood that they were feeling tired. I would then go down and bring them up. Watching me with the twinkling lights of their eyes, they would soon fall asleep.

They slept through and didn't wake up until very early in the morning. Well before that I would go downstairs and open the shop's door fully. After making sure that the fresh breeze outside had filled every cor-

net of the shop, I would close it securely. Then I would bring them downstairs, where there was nothing to harm them.

3

Those days were such that I began to think they would never change, not even the seasons, although now, on the far side of the jungle, where the sky met the earth, a dusty greyness appeared in place of the twilight red, and, at times, the entire sky had a dull muddy color. Somewhere high up the gusting storm left small silent flashes of lightning in its wake. I looked at them and thought of them as a common occurrence because in Nauroz's Shop everything from top to bottom remained intact.

But late one evening when the sounds of laughter and playing had grown progressively fainter and finally stopped, I padded quietly down into the shop and stood by the staircase snapping my fingers. Without straining my eyes I saw the fuzzy shapes crawling toward me, felt a touch on my shins and then a grip on my knees, and I bent down to pick both of them up together—but only a single body came into my hands. I extended one hand and groped around thinking one of the girls was just running away from me as a game. I then turned the lights on in the shop and I knew immediately there was only one girl there. I searched for the other like a madman. I stuck my hand in the empty jars, turned the baskets upside down, lifted up the boards over the underground compartments, and even tugged on the rings which I knew for a fact had no compartment underneath. I looked at the ceiling and the hooks hanging from it, and three times I climbed the staircase which I myself had come down in the first place. The shop's curtain was rolled up in a corner. I unrolled it and spread it out on the floor tapping on each of its folds. Finally, I shook the shop's door, only to discover that its panels were not closed tightly. I didn't remember closing the door that morning, or even opening it, but it was open now.

They were just here, I thought. I went out of the shop and started walking straight ahead. It occurred to me that I had left the door wide open. I scurried back. By the time I was halfway I had already begun to convince myself that I would find them both there when I got back. However, I only found one of them sitting there looking at me. Her eyes were heavy with sleep and she appeared to be waiting for me to tuck her in. I picked her up, brought upstairs and lay her on my bed. I started patting her clumsily as though I wasn't trying to put her to sleep but rather

to wake her up by shaking her vigorously. Even so, she soon fell asleep watching me. I looked at her closely for a moment and then, after covering her, I went out. I had only walked a few steps when it struck me that I had again left the door open. I turned on my heels, closed the door securely, and started off.

I stopped at the bend. Here, the road curved sharply to the right and continued on to other small towns. On my left, the jungle's entrance looked like a crumbling black wall. I had walked some distance along the road when I imagined that I heard a sound in the jungle and, without thinking or planning, I just plunged into that maze of rocks and vegetation. Never before that evening had I ventured into the jungle at night; it was pitch dark inside. I heard a sound like the fluttering of paper. The entire jungle reverberated with it, and it didn't have any significance. As I was thinking of getting out of there, the wind developed into a storm and sounds inundated me from all sides. Somebody said something loudly somewhere quite far away, and all the other sounds immediately grew louder. In the middle of all these sounds, I repeatedly imagined that I heard the sound of a child, but sometimes this sound came from on top of the crowns of the trees growing at the highest elevation and sometimes it appeared to be flitting through the rustling bushes. I was hearing quite a bit more besides. I just kept climbing up and down the piles of rocks as I made my way pushing aside the vines and shoving the bushes apart. Meanwhile, at some point I suddenly realized that the dust storm had passed and the jungle was quiet. I also stopped and stood in complete silence for a while.

There's nothing here, I finally told myself as I peered out into the darkness here and there. In the distance the jungle's entrance appeared like a big bluish blob. I came out, stared down the road that headed toward other small towns for a while, and then I headed back to the shop, but I stopped near it. It wasn't yet late at night so I turned toward the streets of the town and knocked on the door of whatever house I found in front of me. I gaped at the residents of the house with suspicion, queried them insanely, and, by midnight, had earned the displeasure of the entire town. My own displeasure was no less. When I mentioned at the very first door that one of the girls was missing, I was asked, "Which one?"

After that everyone asked me the same question. In answer I grilled them with senseless questions and then pushed on to the next place after making them terribly unhappy. Finally, the important men of the town stopped me at one place and asked me the same question: which girl had disappeared? and then they started to grill me. They also said that I

shouldn't have left the girls alone in the shop in the first place, at which I said, "They weren't alone, I was."

They looked at me the way someone looks at a madman. Then they tried to make me believe that I hadn't been negligent and that, therefore, I shouldn't let it bother me. At this I looked at them the way someone looks at a madman. I did give them some answer or other to every one of their questions, but when one of them, who had been especially kind to me, said, "Nauroz, you shouldn't have been suspicious of everyone like this," I remained silent. And when another man said, "And as far as suspicion goes ... well, we can ask what did you do with her too, can't we?" Still I remained silent.

Whatever they said subsequently, I didn't respond. They interpreted my silence in different ways and talked a lot trying to put me at ease. Nevertheless, I continued standing there in silence. At last, the kind man stepped forward, almost embraced me, and said, "Perhaps this had to happen, Nauroz. And ... in a manner of speaking ... look at it this way: only *one* has disappeared."

"Only one ..." I said, "but which one?"

Naturally, he had no answer, and yet he was about to say something, but, before he could do so, I freed myself from his grasp.

"I've been out here for quite a long time ..." I told him in a tired voice, then returned home.

The only girl was sleeping on my bed as before. I spent the rest of the night watching her. I became convinced that the one who had disappeared was exactly like her; so I couldn't tell, even with one girl sleeping right in front of me, which of the two had, in fact, disappeared. This question was gnawing at me in a million different ways, but the question of which one was the one who was still with me, bothered me even more. While I was still grappling with these questions morning dawned. The girl began to squirm and I became busy taking care of her.

For the next three days I kept her near me constantly. For three days the townsfolk dispatched men to other small towns. For three days these men kept coming to me again and again to look at the girl so that they could describe her to others, and the girl kept clinging to me looking at the outsiders. On the fourth day I noticed that her face was changing: it had become longer, her eyes had become larger than before, and the lights deep inside her eyes now appeared dimmed. She remained absolutely silent at all times, unwilling to let go of me even for a minute, in fact, one of her

hands continued touching my body even when she slept. Some times a faint sob escaped from her lips, as if she had been crying for a long time, although I had never seen her cry, and I wondered whether the other girl might also be in the same condition. Thinking such things I went down the stairs and out onto the road at night, peering everywhere without feeling any curiosity. Soon I heard the sound of crying upstairs. But when I got back, stomping up the stairs, I found her still asleep and silent.

4

Those days which I thought would never change, had changed. And now, to me, these days, these new days, didn't seem likely to ever change. I remembered what the kind man of the town had said, "The disappearance of a child is far worse than its death, Nauroz."

I hadn't said anything in response, but I could tell now why it was so. There were times when I longed for the news of her death to arrive, and there were times when I only wanted to hear that she was alive. I could see that the one who was still with me had gradually begun to wither away.

At last, when a strong desire to do something had arisen inside of me, although I didn't quite know what to do, then, late one night, Nauroz turned up.

He had concealed himself inside of a big blanket and couldn't be seen clearly in the darkness. He knocked gently at the shop's door three times and softly called out Saasaan to me. I peered at him from the window and then went down and opened the door just a little. He didn't come inside. When he sat down on the ground a short distance from the threshold, I realized that it was pointless to try calling him in, so I sat down near him on the threshold.

"One disappeared," I informed him as soon as I sat down.

After that, without asking him anything myself, I told him everything: from the moment when my groping hand had found only one body inside the shop, to the moment when Nauroz, wrapped in the darkness of the town's night and a big blanket, sat down on the ground outside the shop—I didn't neglect telling him anything.

Nauroz heard me out in silence and remained silent for quite a while after I was finished. Then he said, "You aren't willing to give her up."

And, without waiting for my answer, added, "And she isn't willing to stay with me."

Then a tiny body slipped under my arms.

"She looks a little sickly," Nauroz was saying, "but she'll get better living with you, and with the other one."

"You took her, Nauroz?" I couldn't say anything else.

"You guarded her well, but ..." he stopped and touched the door, "it isn't good for doors that are usually closed to be left open one day."

He drew a deep breath, passed his hand over the door, and said, "That's why a curtain always hung over the entrance."

"I've saved the curtain," I told him, then asked, "Shall I get rid of the door?"

"No," he said, feeling terribly distressed, "It's already installed."

"Go now," Nauroz said, "take her to her."

I stood up, and said as I was leaving, "Don't go yet, Nauroz."

"I'm here."

The girl pressed against my chest was sound asleep, nevertheless, I heard her sob faintly. I walked quietly upstairs and laid her down on my bed too. The other girl was crying in her sleep. I parted her gently, and placed each girl's hand on the body of the other. Suppressing a desire to stay there and watch them for a long time, I went down to Nauroz. He had stood up meanwhile and was rubbing his hand over the door. When he saw me he turned around and started going away slowly. I lunged forward and caught up to him and he stopped.

"How is Brother?" he asked.

For a while I struggled with whether to answer his question or not, and then said, "He's disappeared too."

"They didn't search for him?"

"No."

He started walking again with slow steps. Seeing that I was walking along, he touched my shoulder and said, "All right, go back to them now."

Knowing that I wouldn't get an answer, I still asked him, "Where did you go, Nauroz?"

He kept walking forward without saying a word. I asked, "Where do you live?"

I realized that this was more or less the same question, and Nauroz didn't answer this one either. Instead, he started walking faster. I again rushed forward, caught up and walked alongside of him for some ways.

"What are they to you?"

"Merchandise," he answered in one word and then became quiet.

"Who was their mother?"

"They don't have a mother."

"What was she to you?"

"Merchandise," he again replied with the same word and became quiet.

Will he keep this up forever? I wondered, and asked, "Why did you abandon them, Nauroz?"

"Why, you were there, Saasaan?"

"Saasaan," I repeated, and told him, "My name is now Nauroz."

His feet slowed down.

"Two Naurozes at one time ..." he said thinking something and said faltering, "Then one of them has to be crazy."

I realized without a shred of doubt that he hadn't lost his mind, but just then his tone took on a wild quality, "Go back!" he howled, "What you've installed and forget to close is open."

I grabbed his hand, "Nauroz, if I need to see you urgently ..."

"At the mouth," he answered, again with a howl, "sometimes and only ..."

"You live in the jungle?"

"In the jungle, only ... humans don't live in the jungle."

He jerked his hand free and concealed it under the blanket. I clung to a corner of the blanket and asked like an obstinate child, "Why did you abandon the shop, Nauroz?"

"It was time to become mad," he answered, and the blanket was no longer in my grasp.

He was walking so fast now that I couldn't keep up with him. I also remembered the shop's door which had been left open and I spun around and went back, walking more or less as fast as Nauroz was.

Both of them were sleeping, with the head of one resting on the other. I bent over them and watched them for the longest time. Now their two faces looked different to me, but even that night, very little of which was left, I couldn't figure out which one of them had disappeared. The faint sound of their sobs was also identical.

"Where did you find her, Nauroz?" the kind man asked.

"By the ledge of the shop's door," I answered.

"Surely somebody had kidnapped her," he said, "but then why did he bring her back?" He started to think of something.

"Perhaps he couldn't keep her amused."

"Children aren't kidnapped to be kept amused, Nauroz," he said and went off still lost in some thought.

That was the only conversation concerning the girl's return that I had with the townsfolk, although I had feared that I would get tired of responding to a barrage of questions and eventually having to repeat myself over and over. I had imagined that the stream of visitors coming to see her would continue unabated for several days, leaving me little time to attend to the needs of those tiny patients. But no one besides the kind man turned up at the shop, and the girls recovered so expeditiously that I was truly amazed. Before long everything was back to the way it had been, except that I no longer opened the door to let some fresh air in. I looked out the window at the jungle as before and I also brought the girls to the window for longer stretches of time. They mostly played downstairs in the shop as before, while I, in the comfort of my quarters upstairs, listened to them laughing and screeching.

I not only took strolls through the town, I also headed off to other towns, and roamed around in the jungle as well. Many times, I went to the mouth of the jungle at midnight and returned only after going some distance into it in the dark. Nauroz had said that humans didn't live in the jungle, but in this one, by the ruins, I didn't even see an animal, and yet I suspected that Nauroz's place was there somewhere. I even tried to search for him several times during my daytime strolls, but I never did find traces of anyone living there. I did, however, develop some ideas about the ruins during these searches.

At first I had thought that these were the ruins of some large building, but now I was absolutely certain that they were from some hamlet that, without having been visited by any heavenly or earthly disaster, had been progressively deserted over the course of time. Later on, the pressure of the growing trees had shaken its foundations and hidden most of it, and various dust storms had rocked the trees violently causing the hamlet's remains to crumble. How long it might have taken, I didn't try to guess because I couldn't stir up enough interest in me for these lifeless ruins; and I didn't try to imagine how they might have looked in their original condition. I didn't even slow down when I passed by the crumbled walls, drooping columns, and piles of rubble. One day, though, quite a distance in from the mouth, I mistook one of the small ruins for Nauroz's Shop.

The parapet wall of an elevated passageway arching over the depressed ground had become so twisted that, from a distance, it creased

the illusion of an open mouth. I walked over to it quickly. The passageway seemed rather dark; I called out softly, "Nauruz!"

A feeble echo of my voice was heard from inside the passageway, and I entered it. There was absolutely no trace of anyone living there. The area of uneven and unpaved ground was more or less about the size of Nauruz's Shop. The natural round- and oval-shaped pieces of stones were strewn hither and there. I carefully evaluated everything and made sure there was nothing there that could harm children. The thought occurred to me by chance that, if it became necessary, I would bring them over here. After that I came out of the jungle.

That day there was a small fair going on near the road that ran right in front of the shop. In one area some shows for children were taking place. I noticed these children were laughing loudly and calling out each other's names. One of these groups was singing some song over and over in their less than perfect language. I could vaguely understand some of the song's words. As I listened, a thought suddenly crossed my mind, but I couldn't decide whether it was merely a suspicion or if it was a revelation, so I left the fair's shops behind and went toward Nauruz's Shop.

They were now running around inside the shop, the impressions of their tiny feet forming and dissolving and forming again all over the dirt floor. I didn't have to snap my fingers to call them to me. Hearing the sound of my footsteps, they themselves came and stood at the base of the staircase. I bent over to look at them and went up a few stairs backwards. They tried to climb the stairs too, using both their hands and their feet, and one of them fell down softly on the ground. I picked them up.

I'll have to install a barrier here—I thought, and started climbing up. At the top of the stairs I halted. And one here too—I thought again as I stood the two of them on the floor. Then, placing my hands on their shoulders, I talked to them for the first time, the kind of talk one does with children, but instead of saying something in response they merely laughed and clung to me as they looked at me again and again. I called out the names of several common, everyday objects that were around and they kept laughing and holding onto me.

This is the limit, I told myself.

I used to listen to their sounds coming from downstairs, but I never thought about the fact that they were just prattling, not really saying anything. I rummaged around and eventually located the two clay balls that were found in the shop with them. They had been fashioned by baking

fermented grey-colored clay and they were much lighter than their size suggested. It seemed that, if they were dropped, they would bounce on the floor for a long time. I twirled them around and inspected them. All this time the girls' eyes remained fixed on my hands. I maneuvered the balls on the floor in front of them for a while. Then I rolled them from side to side, and both of them immediately became interested, more interested than they had been in anything up until then. I raised the barrier at the top of the staircase and, leaving them to play with the balls, went over to sit by the window. Pretty soon they started to make laughing and screeching sounds and I thought about those sounds.

They could imitate sounds. Just about every sound of the jungle during a dust storm, and also that other sound of someone saying something in a loud voice, could be distinguished in their shrill sounds. Then I realized that they were also uttering some meaningless word-like sounds. I got up and went to them. Whenever they uttered such a sound, I showed them one of the objects that was around and repeated the name of it over and over again myself, and I also let them say it. I did this so much that before long, when I uttered the word, they would look at the object and repeat the word themselves.

In a matter of days they'll start talking to me, I assured myself as I sat them on the bed. They were happy and insistent on continuing their verbal word game, but I went on looking at them wordlessly.

Suddenly one of them let herself fall backwards on the bed and then closed her eyes. Her lips opened and closed two or three times. I bent over and looked at her. Her lips opened and closed again. I placed my hand gently on her head, and she, her eyes still closed, uttered in a slightly heavy voice, "Saasaan."

Then she opened her eyes, sat up, and looked at me laughing innocently and mischievously. I stepped back a few steps and looked at her. Then I came near her, placing my hand on my chest and saying, "Nauroz!"

Without shaking her head no, she said, "Saasaan!" and looked at me laughing as before.

"Nauroz!" I said again, pointing at myself with one finger, "Nauroz, Nauroz!"

She lay back on the bed again, shut her eyes and repeated, "Saasaan! Saasaan! Saasaan!"

Her voice sounded somewhat like a moan, and she had her hands folded over her breast, just as I did when I slept. Sleep came over her even

as I watched, still her eyes opened just a little and then closed, and I heard her drawn out whisper, "Saasaan."

It was a brief sound and a soft whisper, but to me it seemed as if the wind was howling accompanied by all the other sounds heard among the trees of the jungle.

5

It appeared as though I was the slow-witted pupil of two tiny female teachers. In naming objects and remembering those names they were so quick that I couldn't keep up with them. Still, just like the moves of a game learned by a new player hover in his mind day and night, so too their voices echoed continually in my ears, even when—in fact, even more so when—the two had gone to sleep. Just before falling asleep, one by one, each would shut her eyes and utter in a prolonged whisper, "Saasaan."

Afterwards, until they opened their eyes and broke into laughter, I would continue to feel that, instead of two tiny girls, two small women lay before me.

After they had fallen asleep I tried to remember the names they had spoken and I jotted them down on a piece of paper. Then, looking at the paper, I memorized those names. Slowly the number of pieces of paper was increasing and in my free time I nearly exhausted myself poring over them.

Meanwhile, I had stopped paying attention to other sounds. But one day I heard a loud, unfamiliar voice under the window, "Is this Nauroz's Shop?"

The voice of one of the townsfolk came from a short distance away. "It surely is, but it doesn't sell anything now." And then this voice also moved under the window.

The first voice mentioned a couple of everyday items, and the local man gave the names of several shops in town and directions on how to get to them. Then another voice said something softly in an unfamiliar language and the first voice said, "Up there, in the window, there was a girl just now."

"There are two," the local man pointed out, "Nauroz's daughters."

The unfamiliar voices exchanged a few words with each other, after which the first voice said, "And their mother?"

"I haven't seen her."

"When can one meet with Nauroz?"

"He's gone away somewhere. He had become mad."

"Does he have a relative?"

"I don't know much. The other shopkeepers, perhaps they would know."

The unfamiliar voices again talked to each other, and the first voice said, "Who's raising the girls?"

"Nauroz ... I really don't know much, please ask the shopkeepers. Come, I'm going that way."

Then all the voices receded into the distance and disappeared. Just then the girls, who had been silent up until then, attracted my attention toward them.

I couldn't quite figure out the conversation that had transpired below. I decided that it was accurate to think that that conversation, any sentence of it, or rather any word of it, was totally without meaning. Nevertheless, that day, at midnight, I found myself at the mouth of the jungle. After staring at its howling darkness for what seemed like an endless stretch of time, I returned home. I was back at the jungle's entrance again the following night, waiting in vain. The third night I prolonged my stay trying to hear something. I felt the entire jungle was filled with some sort of fanciful hissing sound. This was not the sound of wind; it wasn't the sound of any kind of movement at all. Perhaps then, the sound of the ruins—I wondered, and I felt as though what I had in front of me was not the mouth of the jungle but some eye, and the ruins, hidden in the darkness, were staring at me through its black socket. Even so after going through the futile exercise of staring into that hissing darkness, I returned home.

On the fourth day, about mid-afternoon, I stepped out. When I was returning, after wandering aimlessly along the straight road, my eyes fell on the open door of Nauroz's house. It usually stayed open and from a distance it looked like the door of an empty house. However, that day I spotted people moving around inside. I'd never seen them in the town before. Two or three were also pacing about outside the house. They glanced at me briefly; the real focus of their attention was the shop which they were looking at up and down, up and down, over and over. This

may have been the reason why, when I started to climb up the outer staircase to my place, I felt several eyes creeping along my back.

The two were waiting for me. As soon as they saw me they leapt toward me and, in order to please me, started doing all the things that only children can do; I too did all the things a grown-up can do only to please children and no one else, which don't necessarily indicate his own pleasure. But I didn't let them go anywhere near the window, although I myself did go to it several times. Each time I observed that a strong, steady wind was bending the trees of the jungle to one side, and one eye or another in Nauroz's house was glued to the window.

Today I'll find him no matter what, I decided, even if I have to set up fires in half the jungle. But I was still asleep after midnight. I was awakened by a knock at the shop's door. I waited for a while for someone to call out, then I got up and looked down from the window. I recognized the blanket-wrapped Nauroz and went downstairs. He held my hand gently and let go of it, turning around to go. I closed the door securely and started walking behind him, leaving some distance between us.

His stride was chaotic and uneven. Had I not firmly resolved to see him, I would probably have hesitated to go with him. I noticed that in spite of the uneven strides he walked along soundlessly. I started to walk carefully, my own strides becoming uneven in the effort. If anyone had seen us then, he surely would have wondered who we were and why we were out at that hour. Such an observer, I concluded, wouldn't have been likely to think anything good about us, and I wasn't thinking anything good about Nauroz either.

Meanwhile the mouth had appeared. The space inside looked a little brighter to me even though there were no signs of morning. Nauroz grabbed my hand and entered the jungle. Bending along several curves, we passed by a row of crumbled columns, arrived at a hexagonal platform, and halted. A small pile of wood was burning in the center of the platform giving off the scent of some medicinal oil and sending up curls of smoke.

Nauroz gave me a look.

"Both are OK," I told him. Then I said, "Some people have arrived at your house."

"They are my relatives," he said, "foster relatives."

"Have they come looking for you?"

"No. They've come after making sure that I've disappeared."

"Why have they come?"

"That they will tell themselves," he said, and then asked, "Is Brother with them?"

"No," I said, "but maybe he is. I didn't see him."

"Also some very old man?"

"I haven't seen him either," I said, feeling embarrassed without cause.

Nauroz sat down on the edge of the platform. I too sat down, a little ways from him. In the dim glow of the fire I observed a trace of madness on his face, although it was also apparent that he was living in hardship and shadows of that fluted across his face every now and then making it appear as if his madness had vanished.

"They haven't come to the shop yet, have they?"

"Well, yes they have," I said, "three days ago."

"Three days . . . No, those must be some other people," he said. "They must have come to buy something."

"Yes, they had some things to buy," I said, "but they also wanted to see you."

I gave a full account of those unfamiliar sounds, in as much detail as I had done earlier when I reported the disappearance of one of the girls. Nauroz listened to everything with his head lowered. Even after I had finished, his head remained down for quite a while, until the night came to its end. I was waiting for him to say something, but he was thinking, who knows what. A strong odor of burning wood was wafting from the platform. I looked that way. Thick smoke was rising from the platform. Soon the smoke burst with a soft noise, and flames leapt upward. I felt as though we were sitting inside of a deserted place of worship. The flames arched over to one side and a loud rustling sound was heard. I lifted up my head and saw that the tall peaks of the trees were being buffeted about so much that I could often see the increasing blueness of the sky between them. After quite a long time I looked at Nauroz. He was still sitting in the same position as before and the light from the burning wood was beginning to grow dim.

"Nauroz," I called out to him softly.

"They are different people," he said. "They've come from some distant place. They're not bad. They've come for the ruins."

"Why did they want to meet you?"

"They have come to learn something about the ruins. And now they want to know more—perhaps everything."

"But why did they want to see you?"

"They've also come to learn something about the race that built these ruins . . . or rather, that built the buildings whose ruins these are."

"But why did they want to see you?" I asked again; at the time I couldn't think of any other question.

"Both belong to the same race," Nauroz said in a soft voice. "Haven't you looked at their eyes?"

I remembered how lights glimmered in their painting-like eyes. Then some other questions came to my mind.

"Who was their mother, Nauroz?"

"She had the same eyes," he whispered.

"Who was she?"

"She is no more," he said, a wildness appearing in his tone, "I've already told you."

"What was she to you?"

"I've said that too."

Then he looked at me with tremendous goodwill and placed his hand on my shoulder. "She is no more," he said it again. "Her people too have all perished, except for the two who are with you."

"Why have your relatives come?"

"Perhaps those ruins-people have made it to them."

"To them ..." I checked myself.

Nauroz took close stock of me. He was completely visible in the growing light of the morning. In appearance he usually looked absolutely like a madman, but in that light, with his eyes lifted upward, he looked more like the sage of some untamed nation, and exactly in the manner of a sage he said, "One must endure everything." And then the wildness returned to his eyes and the howl to his tone, "Because one has to endure everything."

He began to look very tired. I suspected that he hadn't slept for several nights. Still I asked him, "Your relatives ... would you like to see them?"

He didn't answer.

"Will I have to talk with them?"

Nauroz remained silent.

"Shall I tell them about you?"

He continued to sit silently. I called out to him softly, "Nauroz!"

Still he didn't open his mouth.

I stood up and walked over to him. He got up too. He repeated, without any wildness this time, and entirely like a sage, "One has to endure everything."

He turned, and I didn't even suspect that this was the last time I was to hear his voice. He wrapped the blanket around himself securely and

walked away with a perfectly even stride toward where there was, perhaps, another *exit* from the jungle.

I too turned around after he had disappeared and walked out of the jungle.

6

Shortly after my return, although it was still quite early, I was informed that Nauroz's relatives had arrived and a meeting had been called, in which I too had to participate, to settle the matter of his house, shop and other effects. I hadn't had a full night's sleep for several days and could hardly remember, except for his last sentence, anything of my conversation with Nauroz in the jungle a short while ago, so this information didn't make any particular impression on me and I spent the time before the meeting taking care of the girls' needs and making them laugh a bit.

"We've abandoned hope of ever finding Nauroz," the kind man said to me.

"You won't find him anymore," I said without a shadow of a doubt, and I believed it just as fully in my heart.

"These people aren't at all hopeful either," he said, pointing toward Nauroz's folks.

We were all gathered behind Nauroz's house and all those people were sitting leaning against the wall of the house. I couldn't make a good estimate of their number, but Nauroz's brother was among them. I looked at him for a long time. His face bore traces of wounds that had healed. Even though two burly men standing on either side of him held him rightly, something welled up inside of him that staggered his restrainers now and again.

Sheer power of madness, I thought, and the kind man, seeing that I was looking at them, said, "He's under the supervision of these people, and so is that one," he pointed at the man who sat in the middle of those men but a little ways from the wall.

He was a very old man, completely toothless and bald, and without eyebrows either. His eyes were so devoid of luster that it was difficult to know whether he was blind or not. He was counting something on his fingers, jotting something down on the palm of one hand with a finger of the other hand as he went along, and making a point of looking at the sky

each time before making an entry. He was wrinkled from head to toe and even though I was looking at him with my own eyes, I was having difficulty believing that a man could be so old.

"He's an old Nauroz," I heard the kind man say, "from two generations ago."

I was somewhat amazed to see that he was sitting with absolutely no support. Sheer power of madness, I thought again.

"And if the present disappeared Nauroz could be found, these people would watch over him too," the kind man said, "as they should."

"Naturally," I said.

I had guessed that the kind man would be talking on behalf of those men, so I kept looking at him. One of the relatives moved forward and whispered something to him. He nodded in reply and said to me, "Now there's only the question of Nauroz's daughters."

"How can anyone say they are Nauroz's daughters?" I said.

"But no one has come forward to claim them."

The answer came to my lips but stopped there. The kind man, finding me silent, said, "After all they must be related to someone in some way."

"They are merchandise from Nauroz's Shop," I said.

"And Nauroz's Shop—whose property is that?" one of the relatives blurted out unexpectedly.

"Anyway," the kind man made a sign to the speaker with his eyes and then informed me, "they have decided to close down the shop; this decision too is theirs to make now."

"Naturally," I said again.

"Now a decision has to be made about the girls, Nauroz."

"My name is Saasaa," I said.

"Ah, your family name," he said, feeling a little melancholy, "I know. Anyway, now the decision about them ..."

"The decision about them too is the right of the relatives," I said.

"You've taken good care of them. They are all grateful to you."

"They are kind."

It seemed that he was finding it difficult to know exactly how to proceed further. Even I, because of lack of sleep, was beginning to feel weary. Since he had been kind to me all along, I said, "They were given to me temporarily in the hope that Nauroz would turn up. Now his relatives have rights over them, and their further upbringing is also the responsibility of his relatives. If they like, they can take them right now." I didn't feel surprised that I had said it all so easily. "But they aren't accustomed

to seeing anyone other than me." I said that just as easily. "If they had been allowed to go out with me ..." Perhaps there was a slight tone of displeasure in my voice.

The kind man moved forward and embraced me. "They'll get used to it," he said. They're still very young. After all, they became accustomed to you, didn't they?"

I quietly freed myself from his grasp, and he said, "We think they should first be kept at Nauroz's house, and then ..."

"But for two days, at least, no one should go near them."

"Absolutely. These people will stay somewhere else during that time. Whatever you say will be done," he said and tried to embrace me once again, but I left.

I made several trips up to my quarters, each one from inside the shop, collecting their playthings and the other items they needed and then I carried those over to Nauroz's house. This took longer than I had expected, perhaps because I checked out Nauroz's house a little on each trip. It was constructed entirely of stone and was very sturdy. The ceiling and walls of the shop and my quarters, on the other hand, had become decayed and didn't look like they would last long. The thought struck me that I should have kept them in the house from the very beginning. Then I went and brought them over too.

As I had expected, they became happy when they saw the new place and so many other new things at once, and they became so engrossed in playing that they didn't even notice that I was leaving and closing the door behind me.

The big dust storm also struck the same day. A few of the townsfolk were expecting its arrival for several days already. They were weather experts and they could, just by looking at the color of the sky and the pattern of the winds, predict even the time of ordinary dust storms. The past two or three days I was also noticing how in the lightening and darkening dusty-colored sky, the sun sometimes looked faint yellow and sometimes it was as white as the moon; how the wind stopped blowing, then suddenly picked up with a gust restoring the blue to the sky; how the wind then moved erratically, as if stumbling every step of the way, and then the sky turned dusty. But I didn't know, nor did anyone tell me, that these were the signs of a big dust storm.

After closing the door of Nauroz's house, I walked slowly until I came to the bend. At the mouth of the jungle I saw a vehicle of some new

style from which baggage was being unloaded. Besides small tents and other essentials, the baggage included tools like the ones used for measuring land and timber. Two men from a neighboring town were giving directions to the laborers who were doing the unloading. Watching all this without much enthusiasm, I moved on. I was taking slow strides and I had no idea how far I had gone until my feet began to ache. Only then did I realize that I had walked all the way to the outskirts of the next town and that sundown was fast approaching. The breeze had stopped completely and, partly because of the stagnant air and partly because of my having walked without interruption for quite a long time, I began to feel hot. I turned around and started walking back, but it soon became very difficult for me to walk at all. I flopped down on the grassy area by the edge of the road and I might have dozed off there were it not for the fact that, with the first blink, it felt as if somebody had pushed me to one side. Startled, I opened my eyes. There was no one around. Must have been a dream, I thought and stood up. I had walked only a few paces when somebody gently pushed me sideways. I realized that it must be because of the wind, which was blowing in gusts. Suddenly it started to blow faster and faster. I was moving forward without putting much pressure on my feet. I knew now that I was in the path of a dust storm and it was no ordinary storm. The mouth of the jungle and, from there, my home were not very far, but the wind suddenly changed direction and my feet strayed off the road. Then the wind changed directions several times and the dust also began to rise so it became difficult for me to keep my eyes open. I had no idea how far I had walked along with the wind nor how many directions I had gone in. Sometimes the wind gusts swirled downward and then spiraled upward with such violent force that it became difficult for my feet to stay on the ground. It seemed as if those dreams in my childhood, the ones in which I soared like a bird, would come true that day. Just then the gusts let up a bit. I heard the sounds of the jungle, some branches crackled, and the smell of medicinal oil wafted into my nostrils. The wind changed direction again and the smell disappeared.

My back struck against something hard and I saw that I had come to the place, a short distance from the road and on the other side of a small, grassy slope, where a series of dry, flat-topped low hills began. The road lay in front of me and, parallel to it, the breached wall of the jungle's outer trees swayed, appearing as though it would collapse any minute. My fatigue had vanished. I continued on, ascending one of the hills. The force of the wind was lessened here because the neighboring hills were

somewhat taller and the hilltop was shaped like a platform with a dip in the middle. Feeling safe from the storm's onslaught, I sat there and began to look at the road and the jungle as if I were a spectator.

Two small tents went rolling down the road with those measuring instruments caught in their ropes. After one of them had rolled some distance, it got stuck on something on the side of the road, while the other puffed up a little and was swept up by a large spiral of wind, disappearing in a whirl. Then my eyes fell on the carriage I had seen at the mouth of the jungle. It was moving along on its own in the middle of the road. Heading straight toward me, it faltered, as if trying to remember the way. It spun around in its place a few times and then went hurtling back in the direction it had come. Just then a violent gust of wind touched down near the carriage causing it to swerve sharply to one side of the road and then leap to the other before overturning and somersaulting down the slope. Only one of its wheels remained on the road spinning like a potter's wheel. Finally it too disappeared.

I looked at the jungle. I had never seen it from this angle and this elevation before. However, at that moment I was unable to determine its outward appearance because the jungle, along with everything in it, was in a terrible state of turmoil. Sometimes the treetops became flat and fluttered like green flags, and sometimes they separated into small clusters colliding with each other. Tall bushes were pressed down, allowing a clear vision of the ruins through the openings in the wall of trees. Sometimes it seemed that the wind had gone completely mad or was frolicking with children, sometimes that there were many different winds, all vying with each other for possession of the jungle's trees. The wind paused briefly, gathering strength, and forced itself up from the ground. Now it looked as though the hairs on the jungle's entire body had stood on end. This was just the beginning. Later on it sometimes felt as if the sky, like some hissing python, was trying to sweep up the entire jungle with its breath and devour it; sometimes as if the trees, like eagles, were about to snatch up the ruins with their talons and take off. But the ruins held their ground tenaciously, although quite a few trees with slender trunks and dense umbrella-like crowns were uprooted and flung into the distance, raining down the soil clinging to their roots. A gust of wind lunged toward me. Some of the dirt from the tree roots hit my face and the smell of medicinal oil drifted into my nostrils once again.

There were many kinds of sounds, but they were drowned out in the howl of the wind, the sound of which made me start to doze off, or perhaps lapse into unconsciousness. Before my senses were completely over-

whelmed, I heard the sound of the houses of the town collapsing and a subconscious question surfaced in my mind: how did I end up on this hill and what was I doing there?

7

The heat of the sunshine woke me up. After a while the fog lifted from my mind and I began to remember everything. The ruins, covered over by greenery in some spots, were spread out right across from me for quite some distance. Here and there small trees stood motionless in between the ruins, as a gentle breeze flowed smoothly and soundlessly through their branches. I glanced at the ruins. It was difficult from such a distance to distinguish between the broken stone columns and broken off or stunted tree trunks.

Had these buildings been intact, I thought, they would now have looked like the site of a terrible disaster. Then I descended the hill, and it didn't take me long to reach the town. Coming to the last turn in the road, I saw that the mouth of the jungle had altogether disappeared, but up ahead Nauroz's Shop could be seen with its mouth gaping wide. But, before going there, I first went around the town and talked with people. Although the damage to trees and houses had been enormous, most lives had been spared, except for a few cattle. This was because the area had always lain in the path of dust storms and people were well prepared. At the moment almost everyone was busy making temporary repairs to their houses and clearing the paths. I just strolled through, and then started back.

Nauroz's house showed absolutely no sign that it had been affected by the storm at all. Its door was still closed, exactly the way I had left it. I went to the front of Nauroz's Shop. Its door had been plucked off its frame by the wind gusts, although who can imagine what kind of gusts they were that the door, instead of falling inside, was lying outside the shop. Then I inspected my quarters.

They were there all right. But it seemed as if somebody had picked them up and then put them back in their place after shaking them about violently, so now they looked like an unsightly turban plopped up on top of the shop's head—scarcely livable. I tried to remember what all had been there. Just then I felt the touch of a palm on my back.

"There has been damage everywhere, Saasaaan," the kind man was standing beside me. "Mercifully, lives have been spared."

He stopped, looked at me, and then continued, "And mercifully too, those people had left here before the storm hit."

I glanced at the closed door of Nauroz's house and then at the kind man.

"Where they come from is not in the path of storms," he said, "so they were quite apprehensive. They aren't used to strong winds. They would have left much earlier but they were delayed somewhat on account of that old Nauroz. He didn't want to leave. He said that he wanted to see the big dust storm. And you know how difficult it is, Saasaan, to make a mad man agree to something."

"One has to become a little mad oneself to do that," I said, and then I asked, "How did they bring him round?"

"Who knows? They had taken him off to one side," he said. "Then there was also some delay because of the stupid women here."

I wasn't particularly aware of the women's presence in the town, so I asked rather inquisitively, "The women—how so?"

"When they saw your ... when they saw the girls they stirred up quite a fuss saying that they wouldn't let them go. And women, you know ... Anyway, they started to cry and wail. You weren't here and ... how shall I put it? ... well, it seemed like a small earthquake had struck before the dust storm."

"I was out at the time," I said.

"Yes. We did come to call you."

He peered at my face for a long time, then grabbed my hand and led me into the shop. Here, no trace of the storm could be seen. Even the dust, still moving about outside, had not reached here. Who knows what kind of wind that was, I wondered, or what kind of shop this was? I turned to the kind man. He pushed down on both of my shoulders and made me sit on the takht, then he took a place beside me himself.

"At their place they'll cheer up the girls in a few days," he started. "They've been taking care of two mad men after all, it won't be too difficult to manage two little girls. In fact, they had tried to cheer up the girls while they were still here, but when they found out ..."

He stopped. So far he had been simply informing me, but now he asked me somewhat dismayed, "Saasaan, you didn't even teach them to speak?"

"They speak," I replied, with a little dismay of my own.

"Your name, but nothing else."

I didn't say anything.

"They don't even know how to say the names of things. But never mind. They'll teach them themselves." He said that as if to reassure me.

Afterwards, for a while, he looked at the jars, baskets and other things that lay scattered around, then his eyes glanced at the dirt floor and he abruptly got up. "Let's go out."

"They've left the shop for you," he said. "They acknowledge your good deed. As for the upper part, we'll fix it up for you, enough so that you can live in it."

"I also had my papers there," I said.

"They went flying out the window," he replied. "But they were all picked up. They're safe with me."

He looked at the shop's open mouth for some time and then said, "There's no merchandise in the shop, but whatever there is, it's yours. Now they only want ..."

"What do they want now?" I asked.

"That you won't go to their place to see the two until they have completely forgotten you."

I remained silent. He waited for my reply for some time, and then lapsed into something resembling a bout of melancholy.

"OK, I'll come back some other time," he said in a weary voice. "A lot of work needs to be done and we're short of men as it is. I'll bring over your papers."

He turned around to leave and said on his way out, "They're very small tight now. They'll forget everything in a few days. Those people—they've promised to send for you themselves later on."

8

The tiny girls must have forgotten everything. Tiring of my papers, I sometimes lift up my head and think: no one has come to call me so far, nor has there been any news.

I bend over my papers again. □

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

Weather Vane^{*}

I

OUR WEATHER VANE, which looked partly like a fish, partly like a bird, had quit showing the direction of the wind long before, yet it stayed on our rooftop till my father's end. Now and then my father was asked why, since it no longer did its job well, it wasn't taken down, but each time he replied that it belonged on the rooftop, and if not there, where? Sometimes he added that it was the emblem of our house, and that this indeed was its true function, for who needed to know the wind's direction anyway?

Well, I did. I was fond of kite-flying. But I didn't need the weather vane. During the daytime I often looked up at the colorful kites sailing in the sky. With a glance at any one of them, far or near, I could tell which way the wind was blowing. I could also tell things the weather vane could not: whether the wind was gentle or strong or uneven. In the evening when it got dark the kites were brought down, and the sky looked somehow desolate. From then until morning one might, of course, need the weather vane to learn the direction of the wind, but when the time for kite-flying was over, why would I want to know the direction of the wind?—and even had I wished to, the vane could not be seen in darkness.

Sometimes after watching a kite in the sky I would glance at the vane and notice that it was pointing the right way. Whenever I saw all the kites aloft in the hot afternoon sun move slowly in one direction, I would suspect that the wind was changing direction even as it blew, and I'd have an impulse to look at the vane. At such times, slowly, as if involuntarily, but quietly and effortlessly, the weather vane would turn right or left and stop

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in the direction the wind blew. When that happened, I'd go up to the roof for a closer look.

On one such occasion I heard it make a sound for the first time ever. I drew still closer to it, but now it had come to rest in the wind's direction and was soundless. I looked at it for a long time that day, and from quite close. It had looked like an animal—part fish, part bird—from a distance. Now, up close, its form bore no resemblance to a bird; it looked entirely like a fish, but its maker had fastened it to its anchor in such a way that it evoked a bird perched on a treetop. It had side and tail fins like those of a fish, but from a distance they could be mistaken for a bird's outstretched wings and tail, making it appear at an idle glance to be simply a bird, and not a fish at all; perhaps this was also because its business was with the wind and not with water. Distance also made it seem delicate and slim, but now, on closer examination, it looked rather heavy and ungainly. No doubt it had been constructed to endure all manner of intemperate weather and wind.

I had been staring at it for a long time, and just when it had become clear to me that it was only a fish, the thought crossed my mind that it was in fact a bird that had by some strange process turned into a fish. Precisely at that moment my eyes caught sight of a kite flying in a straight line in the direction the vane was pointing, and I sensed that the gently blowing wind was again changing course. Involuntarily my eyes returned to the vane: it was still pointing in the earlier direction, quivering slowly. I pushed it gently in the direction of the prevailing wind, and as I did, again heard it make a feeble sound. I couldn't determine which of its components was making that sound, nor did I realize then that its inexorable decline had already begun, for my attention was fixed on the sound itself, which seemed vaguely familiar to me, though I was having difficulty recalling where I'd heard it. My eyes probed the vane all over. By now it had stopped wavering and had aligned itself with the wind's path.

After that I noticed several times that it was not pointing accurately, and each time it occurred to me that I should tell Father that our weather vane was behaving erratically. Since it did work accurately at times, however, I didn't mention it, but now, the minute I got to the rooftop I would first look at the vane and then search the sky for a kite to determine which way the wind was blowing. Usually the wind was blowing in a direction other than the one the vane indicated. Now and then, though, the wind changed its course and started blowing in the direction indicated by the vane. On those occasions it occurred to me that our vane was not bound by the wind, but rather that the wind was bound by our vane.

Strange thoughts came into my youthful mind in those days, the strangest being the notion that not only could the vane turn itself in the wrong direction, it was also quite capable of turning the wind in that direction.

Finally, one day it came to rest in a direction no wind had ever blown. The season of hot, gusting winds had arrived, and the time for flying kites was over. The wind early in midday had started to turn hot and I could feel the sensation of it on my body, although it had not become so strong that I could determine its direction merely by this touch. Even then I really didn't feel a need for the weather vane. I ran downstairs, took a sheet from my stationery supplies and picked up a shard from the broken clay water jar lying in the trash in the courtyard. By the time I returned to the rooftop I had ripped the paper into round pieces, which we called *takkals*, and pressed them together into a small wad. Standing near the vane I placed the shard under the wadded paper and tossed the entire lot straight up. The shard rose some distance, projecting the wad along with it, then halted in midair for an instant before falling back down alone. The *takkals* also remained immobile for a second, then scattered everywhere. Just at this moment I heard the shard hit the back end of the weather vane, making a hollow sound, and my attention was diverted from the *takkals*. The faint vibration in the vane was just dying out. I gently rubbed the back part of the vane with my hand, exactly the way one pats a child after an injury, or an animal when one is pleased with it. And then I looked up. All the *takkals* were moving in a single direction, from west to east, tossing and turning in the air. At last they disappeared below the rooftop.

I looked at the vane. It was fixed in a different direction from that of the wind. I made a feeble effort to move it, but it had jammed in its position. I tried to move it the other way, but it didn't budge. When I tried to turn it with some force, it again emitted a faint sound and vibrated, and I feared that if I applied more force I might break off a piece of it, or the vane itself. I had drawn back a little and was gazing at it when I heard a voice.

"Why—is it broken?"

A girl was standing on the rooftop of the house that abutted our own. The wind made her diaphanous *dupatta* ripple ever so gently. Her eyes were fixed on the weather vane. Then she looked at me. This girl, and others from the neighboring houses, came up to their rooftops in good weather and talked among themselves in hushed tones. Sometimes one would have a few girlfriends with her. At such times they all talked and laughed loudly. They also looked at our weather vane and pointed it out

to each other. I paid more attention to my kite-flying than to these girls, although their voices always reminded me of the cacophony of the little birds that twittered, at roosting time in the evening, amid the vines covering the low walls of our courtyard.

This, however, was not the time for girls to appear on the rooftops. Seeing this girl standing all alone on her roof in the dead, barren stillness of the noon hour, staring at the weather vane, gave me the inescapable feeling that one of our family secrets had been divulged. Meanwhile she asked again, "Broken?"

"No," I said. "It works all right."

"Oh?" she said, looking at her dupatta. "But the wind ..."

"The wind is blowing wrong," I said before she could even finish.

She stayed on awhile longer, gazing wistfully at the vane, then she turned around, picked her way slowly over to the stairs on the other side of the rooftop and climbed down.

I thought I might now inform my father that the weather vane had stopped working. But I decided against it, thinking to give it another few days, perhaps. Now, though, I did make several trips to the rooftop every day and, finding the vane always turned in the same direction, came back down. I made it a special point to visit it early in the day. I stared at it until the sun got stronger and the air warmer. Sometimes as I watched I began to doze off, only to be quickly roused by some sound or other nearby. Once I heard some rustling sounds, looked up, and saw the sky filled with soaring kites of different colors, as on certain festivals days. I observed this crowded assemblage with interest for a while, then remembered the weather vane and looked back at it. It had oriented itself in the direction the kites were flying. I glanced up at the sky. The kites were moving slowly to the right. Then I looked at the vane; it too was moving slowly to the right. Just as I was about to sit down and inch my way toward it, a gust of hot air slapped me lightly in the face and I was startled awake. The sun had grown quite strong and the ground had started to heat up. I looked at the sky: not a kite anywhere, but I could tell that the wind was blowing west to east from the scorching blasts of its gusts. However, the vane was still stuck in that totally mysterious direction. I rose and went up close to it. The hot gusts of wind violently assaulting its right side seemed to be trying to knock it down from the roof, but it held its ground, like a stone statue, without even a slight shudder. At this I concluded with certainty that it was definitely broken. I hastened downstairs to let Father know. I was also feeling somewhat elated. It was the same kind of elation that children—even grownups, I can say now—feel

when they come upon some special news, even if it's bad news, that they can relate to others before anyone else.

As I climbed down the stairs I remembered that in my dream I had also felt angry with the vane, but now, after waking up, I couldn't recall the reason for my anger.

•

I went straight to the reception room in the outer side of the house, where my father had taken up residence. He lay there reclining in a large rattan chair. Although I had observed him in this room and in this chair for a long time, I remembered the days when he used to live in the inner part of the house and would often be obliged to go to the reception room, because quite a few people came to see him. Many visitors still came to see him now, but at this particular time only my mother was sitting near him, and at first I didn't see her. I had just walked in from the bright sunshine outdoors and the room seemed to be filled with darkness. I couldn't even see the rattan chair, though I was certain my father was in it, and moreover that several visitors must also be present in the room. That's why I blurted out the news about the vane excitedly, almost as though I were making an announcement. I even volunteered that it had been stuck in the wrong position for the past several days, and that its parts had probably gotten jammed. Meanwhile the darkness in the room dissipated and I saw that Mother had her finger on her lips, asking me to be quiet. So I was. I would have stopped talking anyway, because I'd already said all I wanted to say. I glanced at my father. He was lying almost flat in his chair, covered up to his waist with a sheet, his eyes closed, his tranquil face indicating he was sound asleep.

I was silent; still my mother again brought her finger to her lips, beckoned me to come near her and whispered to me, "He had a very hard time falling asleep."

Just then my father's voice was heard, "What happened? What's broken?"

My mother again gestured me to be quiet and whispered, "He's sleeping."

My father's face and closed eyes continued to reflect the same tranquillity. Both my mother and I kept looking at him and then she said softly, "Are you busy?"

The season for flying kites being over, I had all the time in the world. I shook my head to indicate that I was free.

"Well then," she said, "sit by his side for a while. I'll be back soon."

I sat down near my father. Mother got up to go outside but then she hesitated and turned around, signaling me to come to her and asked me even more softly, "Really, it's broken?"

I was about to nod when my father made an effort to turn over. This was very hard for him to do, and he needed help to accomplish it. His eyes opened a few times and then closed. Mother came to his chair and carefully helped him turn over, and he went back to sleep. Mother bent over and whispered into my ear, "Don't tell him that," and went out of the room.

I sat gazing at my father in silence. He was still stretched out, his eyes closed, his face tranquil. Lying with his eyes closed he asked, "Since when has it stopped working?"

Is he sleep-talking? I asked myself. Just then his eyes opened and a look of pain crept over his face. He was again trying to turn over. When I tried to assist him, he stopped me and said, "Wait until your mother's back."

"Shall I call her?" I asked, rising.

"No. She'll be along soon," he said, and then he asked, "Since when?"

I felt obliged to give him the answer, and was rather happy to have this obligation. I remembered the day the weather vane had begun to work erratically, how the wind had been changing course while the vane failed to move along with it. I told my father all that had transpired since that day forward. What I didn't tell him he asked himself: "You tried to fix it, didn't you?"

I flatly denied it. He kept gazing at me with his half-open eyes. I suspected that he didn't believe me, and I started to feel a bit guilty. And as a guilty person will, I was coming up with another lie when he said, "All right, but don'tinker around with it, and..." he placed his hand on mine, "don't tell your mother."

He wanted to say something more, but hearing a sound at the door, he stopped. My mother had brought something for him to eat. Before she had reached his chair he gently pressed my hand and said, "Don't tell anyone."

The very next day he was surrounded by visitors, all of them talking about the weather vane not working properly.

As I have said, the visitors who came to see my father were numerous. They included some who were unfamiliar; they came once or twice and then I didn't see them again. Besides these changing visitors, there were

also those who came to see him regularly, almost every day. If one of these showed up after an absence of several days, my father inquired after his well-being in a partly disgruntled, partly anxious voice. Even though most of them were residents of our own neighborhood and lived in houses close to ours, I rarely saw them out in the lane or street. However, I did see some of them on their rooftops, mostly taking sun in the winter, when I went to our roof to fly a kite. At those times they all wore ordinary domestic clothing, but when they showed up at our house they were dressed from head to toe in formal clothes, as if they had come to attend a party. My father, too, whenever a visitor was announced, went to the reception room not in his home clothes but fully dressed as if to receive a guest. But ever since he had made the reception room his permanent living quarters he had put aside this formality, preferring to pull a sheet up to his shoulders rather than change into formal clothes.

Often I had to escort the visitors to this room. Sometimes my mother also commissioned me to carry fruit drinks and such like to show the guests hospitality. At those times I enjoyed catching snippets of the conversation in progress, though I never could hear them well enough; I never really stayed there very long. All I knew was that they all, my father included, made exceedingly fine conversation and laughed heartily, although the minute I appeared they would hush up somewhat, and I would quickly leave.

That day, however, when I entered holding a tray of food all the visitors suddenly grew quiet and looked at me so attentively that I was disconcerted and, for no reason, began to feel guilty, although all of them, including my father, were smiling and looking at me the way kindly elders regard young people. After some time one of them asked, "Son, that thing on the rooftop, the thing that shows the direction of the wind..."

"It's broken," I quickly told him, and then, embarrassed, I looked at my father, but he was still smiling. Gently, he said to me, "Tell them everything."

"Yes, Mian, from beginning to end," one of the visitors said.

And I told them everything I had already told Father, but not that I'd tried to correct its direction.

Silence followed and continued for a long time, until the smiles slowly evaporated from their faces. Then someone said to Father, "That's why we keep telling you to have it taken down."

In response my father gave the same explanation mentioned earlier. After that they started talking of other things, and I left with the empty tray.

In the days that followed I heard the weather vane mentioned in that room many times. Gradually, though, it came to be mentioned less and less, perhaps because the number of daily visitors had also started to dwindle.

Before two winters had passed only a few visitors still came, and even that remainder thinned down to one or two at a time. In the end only a single visitor was left, and he came only sporadically. He had started to experience difficulty in walking. Someone from his house escorted him to our place, then returned later to help him go back. But even in those days this visitor was dressed from head to toe in the finest garb.

One day, while I was present, I heard this last remaining visitor talking once again with my father about the weather vane. He put the same old questions, to which my father gave the same old answers. That day, for the first time ever, I butted into my elders' conversation and asked them something that had often crossed my mind, "Can't it be fixed?"

"Who'll fix it?" my father said in a despairing tone.

"Only he could have fixed it, son," added the visitor, even more despairingly, "who made it in the first place."

My father shook his head abjectly in agreement, then said, "Others will only make it worse."

The visitor nodded despondently, agreeing with my father. A long silence ensued, during which the two men seemed to be carrying on a nonverbal conversation, until the servant from the visitor's house showed up to take him home.

After he was gone, my father called me over to him.

"Give up worrying about *that*, son," he said, "worry about your mother instead. You do see, don't you, how she is killing herself caring for me."

Right then Mother, who had perhaps been waiting for the visitor to leave, walked into the room. She was holding a round brass salver in her hands. A brazier was set in the middle of the salver and some kind of oil was being warmed in a small vessel over the burning coals. The oil's aroma filled the entire room and it began to feel safe and warm. She placed the salver on the floor close by the chair, removed the vessel, holding it with the edge of her dupatta, and set it too on the floor. Father kept looking at her, and then he said, "You do all the work yourself; aren't there other people in the house?"

Without troubling to answer him, Mother removed the sheet covering his body and started to fold it.

3

Surely there were other people in our house, but my mother personally took care of all of Father's needs. She never complained of anything at all, so none of us ever imagined that she was killing herself. One morning, though, time went by and she didn't get out of bed. By afternoon her dead body was lying in the midst of all our relatives, from near and far.

That day other people in the house did everything for Father and kept the news of Mother from him. In the evening, however, instead of inquiring about Mother, he himself gave the news of her, adding, "I'd already foreseen it."

He didn't talk to anyone for several days. Various people in the house tended to his needs. Visitors had long since stopped calling on him. And no one came even when Mother died, or perhaps someone came but I didn't know about it. Now we made sure that a member of the household was with him at all times. I also went into his room several times during the day and stayed for quite a while.

One evening as the birds were twittering in the vines of our courtyard, I stepped into the reception room and found the last of the visitors with my father. Only with difficulty was I able to recognize this person, but I couldn't calculate how many days had passed since he had last come to our house. He was sitting in the visitor's chair rather precariously and one of the servants of his house, who himself seemed to need assistance, stood behind the visitor to keep him from pitching this way and that. This time around the visitor was wearing ordinary at-home clothes, and it occurred to me that he used to sit on the rooftop of the house adjoining ours in the winter sun, with a single cloth draped around his waist. Back then, though, I had not thought he was one of my father's visitors.

He was sitting in silence with his head bowed, his body rocking this way and that in uncoordinated motion. My father too was silent. It seemed neither was conscious of the other's presence. And I too was standing silently. As I continued gazing at the two of them I once again felt as though they were talking to each other without words. I was near the headrest of my father's chair, the visitor directly in front of me. His

body was still shaking, the servant supporting him, sometimes with both hands and sometimes with one, while fanning his head with the other as if shooing away flies. I looked closely by turns at the visitor's face, then at my father's and, with no evidence, began to suspect that they were on the subject of the weather vane. My suspicion became a certainty when all of a sudden my father said aloud, "Use? No use at all. All the same, it's not getting in anyone's way, is it?"

The visitor nodded over and over for a long time as if in confirmation. Finally, his old servant took him home, supporting him along the way; twice the servant himself staggered and nearly fell down.

•

By the time the rains ended everyone sensed that my father was not likely to last much longer. He was receiving more care now; his every need was diligently attended to. Whenever something was done for him he would bless all of us in a happy tone. But he also appeared to be thinking about something. I spent most of my time in his room now, watching him think. Sometimes his eyes were open fully and sometimes only halfway, yet he didn't seem to be looking at anything. Seeing him in this condition I thought sometimes that he was remembering Mother and sometimes that he was thinking of the weather vane. But his condition was deteriorating so rapidly that pretty soon I forgot about the vane and about Mother as well.

There were no longer any clouds to be seen in the sky. Still, without a cloud in sight, lightning would suddenly flash, prompting people to speculate as to whether it might rain. One night—it must have been during the last days of the waning moon—the silent flashes increased in frequency. I was in my father's room. Here it remained dark even during the day, but that night it seemed as though very strong lights were being turned on and off in unison. My father would appear, sitting in his chair, and then disappear in darkness. The experience of this light and darkness, which had quite pleased me in my childhood, now made the room seem as though captured in the throes of a terrifying struggle. My father was lying quietly. Suddenly I sensed that he was caught in the throes of death. I thought of calling to the other people in the house, but just then I heard his weary voice: "Who's up there?"

I drew close to him.

"Up where?" I asked, bending over him.

"Up on the roof," he said. "Someone is talking up there."

I strained my ears. It was quiet all around, with only the flash of lightning; I strained harder, now even I began to hear a faint sound. It was a little like the moaning that issues involuntarily from the mouths of very old people when they move. But it didn't appear to be coming from the roof, or from anywhere.

The faint sound was heard again, and I quickly remembered that a long time back it had come from the weather vane, once when the wind was changing direction, and a second time when I'd tried to turn it in the direction of the wind.

Lightning flashed again and I saw that my father was trying to hear that sound. I said, "I'll go up and have a look."

He didn't respond. I quickly left the room, crossed the courtyard, climbed up the staircase and came out onto the roof.

The weather vane could be seen sparkling intermittently a little distance ahead. In a flash of lightning it looked like a delicate object of pure silver. I walked up to it and looked it over. It was still locked in the same mysterious direction, without movement or sound. As I walked round it repeatedly, looking at it closely, I caught sight of a figure standing on the roof of the house adjoining ours, the face illumined repeatedly from the light of the flashes.

Some old woman in her declining years, or so it seemed. I was having great difficulty trying to make out who she was and was straining to get a better look at her each time there was a flash.

Finally I remembered that in the past she used to come up to the rooftop with her women friends, and even alone. Now she was alone, watching the weather vane from her rooftop and apparently oblivious of my presence. I also tried to act unaware of her presence and, taking slow steps, I climbed down the stairs.

In the room my father was still lying on the same side. I tiptoed in, but he heard my footsteps and asked, "Was anyone there?"

I told him that only the weather vane was up there. And also that it was quiet and hadn't changed direction. For a long time he continued lying on the same side in silence. Just when I had convinced myself that he had fallen asleep, he drew a deep breath and said, "Do see to it that it's taken down," and drew another deep breath.

I stared in the direction of his voice. The lightning had meanwhile stopped flashing and a cloud was thundering somewhere in the distant sky. I came close to my father and looked intently at his face in the dim glow of the only light burning in the room. He was sleeping soundly, the cloth lying on his chest heaving gently up and down.

After that, as we had all already sensed would be the case, my father didn't live much longer. He was entirely lucid until the end, and he even talked a little. Mostly he gave blessings to those who looked after him, expressing regret now and then that he was causing them inconvenience. As for the weather vane, he never once mentioned it. This didn't surprise me as much as the fact that he didn't even mention Mother. However, on his last day he did utter Mother's full name, including "daughter of..." but before he could say anything further, he died.

4

After my father's death I became preoccupied with household matters. During this period new levels were added to several houses in the neighborhood. This new construction surrounded my house to such an extent that it was no longer possible to see the weather vane from the ground. I hadn't noticed it at first, but one day on my way home I came to the corner where my rooftop and the vane atop it had once been visible. The newly built upper story of a house blocked the sight of both of them. I went around and looked from different angles. The vane could not be seen from any of them.

After circling around unsuccessfully a few times, I returned home and went straight to the roof. The vane was still fixed firmly in its direction, without the slightest change in its appearance. Its drab color and clumsy shape made me wonder with surprise how it could have appeared delicate and silvery in that flash of lightning. Even so, it looked more charming at this moment than it had that night.

The next day a workman began tearing down the small platform to which the vane had been anchored. Before starting he had made it clear that he would take the vane down carefully, but he wouldn't be able to reattach it at the correct angle again. Upon which I had told him, "No reattachment will be needed." After that he had set to work, relieved.

He removed several layers of mortar from the platform, until the vane's anchor grew loose and began to wobble. As he continued to work, the man turned toward me and asked, "Do you have a place in mind for it?"

I hadn't thought about that at all. I made a quick decision and said, "On a high shelf or inside a big trunk."

"It'll get ruined lying around like that," he said, and then, after a pause, added, "I have a suggestion, if you'd agree to it."

And I accepted his suggestion.

5

Not as many visitors call on me as called on my father. These visitors keep changing, and they come only when they have something to ask me, or I have something to ask them. When they first come, every visitor looks with curiosity, at least once, at the odd-looking fish resting on its anchor on the small platform built in a corner of the reception room. Its tail and its head are exactly the same height from the floor, which is why it looks flat, sitting there on the tip of the anchor, and no one looking at it ever thinks that it's a bird, whose business is with the wind. Everyone thinks of it as a decorative object, so no one asks me what it's for. Nor do I tell anyone that it's our weather vane, which no longer works. ☐

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*

The Heir*

MY FATHER DIED when I was a child. My mother mourned him deeply, so much so that within a few years of my father's death she too passed away. I have absolutely no recollections of my father. I have some memories of my mother. I mostly remember her sitting on the prayer rug and sometimes I can recall an image of her picking me up in her arms and carrying me upstairs. But by the time we reached the top of the stairs I would be asleep, and when I awoke I would see her sitting on the prayer rug. That's all. I have no memory of her death. My father's brother, the eldest in the family, who was a celebrated *aamil* in the city in his time, raised me. He was also an expert in *jafar* and *ramal*. He received visitors in the front room of the house and a large number of people called on him. It seemed like a regular doctor's office except that one wouldn't find such an assortment of patients anywhere else like those who visited my uncle's place. They were, for the most part, men and women who were afflicted or possessed by a ghost or spirit; affected by something paranormal. Besides these, there were those who were looking for lost loved ones, some who were caught up in litigation, some looking for jobs or suffering from chronic ailments, and who knows with what other problems and long sufferings people came here. My uncle made house calls to a few important wealthy families. Mostly, however, he met people in his front room. He prescribed different treatments. In addition to writing a *tasviz* or a *naqsh*, he might prescribe, for example, that a patient stand in the middle of a rivet and recite mystical-magical incantations. He might prescribe trapping and releasing a number of different species of birds, and who knows what else. His conversation skills were superb. Patients were

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semi-cured just by talking with him. He wore spotless white clothing and was handsome and healthy.

In those days, the household income was more than enough. There were many people in the house. My uncle's own family was small. There were he and his wife and their daughter Nafisa. They had twin boys, but they died in infancy. If the boys had lived they would have been my age. Now there were just the three of them, but there was a whole host of distant relatives whose expenses were borne by my uncle. He had a gentle disposition, and going out of his way for others was in his temperament. My aunt was a good woman too. She had a bit of a sharp tongue though. She would get angry. But she never reprimanded me. Since I was the only child of Uncle's deceased younger brother, she cared for me just as much as my uncle did. Little Nafisa was always following me around and I adored her.

Then our circumstances began to change. My uncle's health deteriorated. He lost interest in his work. He stayed in his room inside the house, mostly lying in bed. People needing his help would come and then go away. Sometimes my aunt would urge him, "At least ask! Who knows what's ailing the poor fellow?"

Once in a while, Uncle would emerge sluggishly, go to the front room, ask some routine questions of the visitor and prescribe a *nagh*. Most often he would send a message saying he wasn't well and ask the person to come another time. Eventually, after many months, my aunt's suspicions were aroused and then her hunch that Uncle had an addiction was confirmed. It could have been opium or something else.

I was twenty years old then. My education was still incomplete. Uncle had not taught me his art. My aunt had said to him many times, "Teach the boy a thing or two. He'll assist you. Your days are over now. After all, don't we have to live?"

But Uncle didn't pay any attention to her. I tried to find jobs here and there. But I was unsuccessful because I was young and had insufficient education. The household income was dwindling. Most of the distant relatives who lived with us went away, having tired of being the victims of my aunt's temper. Within two years our prosperous home resembled a dusty wilderness.

At that time I did something odd, or, I should say that an odd thing was done by me.

One day an old acquaintance of Uncle came to visit. This person was known as a "courtroom freak." At any given time, he would be contesting several cases and filing new cases against others. This was his pastime. He

would plead cases on behalf of other people as well. He would earn something from doing this. It was in connection with these court cases that he would come to see Uncle and ask for a *taaviz*, etc. A few years earlier he had stopped visiting Uncle. Meanwhile, Uncle too was no longer what he used to be. Now, that gentleman came to call and Uncle refused to see him. But the visitor was stubborn. He announced loudly from the foyer that he wouldn't leave without a meeting; that it was an urgent matter. Meanwhile my aunt insisted and Uncle got up mumbling to himself. He asked me to unlock the front room and went to wash up. Then he called me into the room. The visitor was sitting there, silent. Uncle said to me, "Do you know him? Go with him and ..."

He gave me a small glass bottle and a skillfully folded paper sachet.

"This is special water. Keep giving a little from it, half a teaspoon, straight down the throat until the patient sleeps, and now and then provide medicinal smoke inhalation," he said pointing towards the paper sachet.

The visitor got up and said to me, "Come along, *mijan*."

I received only parts of the picture. Some of it I didn't understand. Nevertheless, I accompanied him without a murmur. His house was in a distant neighborhood. Along the way we had to cross a couple of obstacles. It was evening when we finally got there. The house was large but its shabbiness was obvious from the outside. The wooden main door was missing one side. The visitor left me at the front door and went in. I stood there taking in the moldiness of the foyer. Eventually a woman appeared and invited me in.

The inside of the house was worn out too, but one could tell that it had seen better days. A large portion of it wasn't fit for living and the residents had confined themselves to two or three verandas. I was seated in one of those. No one spoke for some time. It was clear that they were disappointed to see me. I did not think it was appropriate to waste more time with small talk, so, I asked, "Where do we have to go?"

There was a door in the wall. I was asked to go through that door. God knows where the litigating gentleman I came with had disappeared. The family members stopped at the door. I stepped in. It was a small room, poorly lit. There was a bed and someone was lying on it. When my eyes adjusted to the dimness, I saw a chair by the bed and a lighted coal brazier burning by its side. I heard sounds of sobbing coming from the bed. I dropped a little powder on the coals from the paper sachet. The room was filled with fragrance. The sobbing intensified and then ceased.

Someone asked in a deep voice, "Who are you?"

A girl perhaps eighteen or so years old was lying on the bed in front of me. Her face was flushed and her hair somewhat disarrayed. She looked at me intently and offered some name in the same deep voice. Then the voice said that the girl was his and uttering my name said that I should clear out of his way. I got the picture. Such patients were often brought to my uncle's dispensary. It was alleged that some jinn possessed them. They would respond quite well to Uncle's treatment. I dropped some more powder on the coals. The voice inquired somewhat agitatedly, "What are you doing?"

But instead of replying, I uncorked the bottle. Uncle had not forgotten to include a spoon with it. I gave half a teaspoon. I had imagined that it would be hard to make her swallow the liquid but there was no protest from her. After drinking the liquid she began sobbing again. She shuddered a few times and asked for more and drank some. She also asked me to drop more of the powdery stuff on the coals and ultimately fell asleep, contented. The night was still young. I stepped out into the veranda, handed the sachet to an elderly woman and informed her that the girl was sleeping. "If she has any problem during the night, liquid from the bottle and smoke inhalation should be administered." But I had hardly finished my sentence when sounds of weeping came from the room. The elderly lady rushed in with the bottle and the sachet. She had barely entered the room when a masculine voice scolded her so soundly that she came back obviously shaken. The sound of weeping could be heard again. I went inside. The masculine voice said, "My rival is here."

Then the girl began to cry and sob. I gave her the liquid and added some powder from the sachet to the coals. She went back to sleep. This happened over and over again and soon it was 10 P.M. It was a distant neighborhood. It would have been difficult to find some form of return transportation because of the lateness of the hour. The gentleman who had brought me here and gone away now returned. He made detailed inquiries about the patient from the women, sat down to dinner and made me sit down to eat as well. At first I didn't quite comprehend what he was talking about, but before long I realized that he was talking about marriage. He was saying, "It's vital for the girl's life. The ceremony can be performed discreetly. You can visit her whenever you like. The girl will stay here. You're a sensible person."

I hadn't up to that minute ever thought of marriage. But now it seemed that all along it had been my ardent desire to enjoy the pleasures of married life.

Without another thought, I agreed. It was also decided that I wouldn't inform the people at home about this arrangement. The marriage was to be a secret. The gentleman took the women aside and spoke with them. Then he went outside. He returned in a little while with a few men. Two of them looked like *maulvis*. I have no recollection of the ceremonies that were performed. All I remember is that one of the gentlemen represented me as my advocate and another the girl's, and the *nikah* was solemnized. I didn't even catch the girl's name properly. It was midnight when I was shoved into the girl's room.

The girl was a little made up now and she was sitting up in bed in a normal fashion. I was really unaware of the night's passing. I don't remember when I fell asleep, but when I awoke the sun was high in the sky. The litigating gentleman had disappeared again. The women were graciously carrying out the chores of hospitality. Upon inquiring, I learned that the gentleman was busy in some litigation. Then I don't know what came over me. I began to insist that I wanted to take the bride with me. At first the women made excuses but when I refused to give up, they were compelled to give in. I had gone there to treat a possessed woman and married her. I didn't seem to find that odd. And bringing the bride home after marriage was natural. The women couldn't argue with me, and I set off for home with the bride who was accompanied by her tired looking relative.

When our carriage stopped in front of the house, Nafisa was the first to come out to the foyer. She was surprised to see women in the carriage and looked at me. I said, "This is your sister-in-law."

She leapt forward and lifting the bride's veil scrutinized her face carefully, then she said, "Oh my God, she's so sweet!" and took the bride inside. My aunt was astounded on seeing her. A couple of female relatives who still stayed with us came around to look as well. I briefly informed my aunt that I had married and brought the bride home. Nafisa was with the bride and was engrossed in lifting the bride's veil and looking at her every so often. Aunt said, "Nafisa, take her upstairs."

Nafisa accompanied the bride and her relative upstairs. Meanwhile Uncle was summoned from his room. Now I was asked to give the details. I repeated whatever I could recollect and, as I was telling the story, it began to dawn on me that I had behaved irresponsibly. My aunt and uncle made no comments. They were utterly shocked. Eventually, Uncle said, "I don't understand any of it."

Now I was feeling dizzy and I had no explanation for what I had done the previous night. Uncle asked me very gently, over and over again,

but I was unable to give an explanation that could satisfy him. At this point a few neighbors also came by. Uncle went to the front room to receive them. Some of the neighboring women had come along too and my aunt sat in their midst. After some time, Uncle came inside and began conversing in a low tone with my aunt. I only caught one phrase, "Send her back at once."

Then he went to his room. Aunt went upstairs with a couple of women. I remained sitting quietly where I was. I heard voices being raised upstairs. I still kept sitting. Then I heard the women come down the stairs. My aunt came first. She was grumbling, "Such tantrums on the first day!"

The other women followed. In a few minutes the bride and her relative came down, and finally, Nafisa. The bride was in a flaming temper. She kept repeating, "Did I plead with them?"

I was sitting right there. But she didn't look at me. Leaning on her relative's arm she continued towards the hallway. She stopped short and looked back at Nafisa. She was crying. Then she drew close to Nafisa, embraced her and stepped out into the hallway.

In the evening, the litigating gentleman called on us. He was both embarrassed and angry. Some neighbors joined us. Uncle sent me inside. Nafisa wanted to find out from me what was going on in the front room. I told her that I didn't know and also added, "I won't leave her."

At night Nafisa tried to find out from my aunt but was brushed off, "Don't you interfere in these affairs. What is being done is right."

Aunt did not talk to me at all. On the third day the litigating gentleman came again and went away after several hours. On the fifth day he came and left shortly thereafter. When he had gone, Uncle called me. I was a bit scared but he didn't scold me. There were a couple of people in the room. Uncle passed me a paper and said, "Put your signature on this."

I signed without protest. Uncle took the paper back from me and said, "Now just forget everything that happened."

"I'll never forget," I said to myself, and then got up and left the room.

The following day I got a routine, temporary job at the city court and I became caught up in the formalities of a new job.

Uncle's health was going from bad to worse. My earnings helped maintain the household a little. But Uncle's addictions were getting more intense. He had begun disposing of the family belongings. But he never indulged in his addiction with my money.

One day he sold off his books on divinatory and magical practices. For a few days he lay intoxicated. Afterward he sent for me, sat me by his side, and began in a weak voice, "I did nothing for you. I didn't teach you my art. Now the books are gone too. I'm going. *Bhai* is there as well—what will I say when he questions me?"

"You brought me up from a child to a young man, educated me, helped me stand on my own feet. What more could you have done?"

"The books are gone," he said again, "but two or three of my notebooks are still lying somewhere. If you don't get a decent job then ..."

Then his condition became really bad. The next day he died before sundown.

Aunt didn't live long after his death. A relative who had been persuaded to stay on looked after her. She wouldn't allow Nafisa to do the work. She would hold Nafisa close several times a day and cry a lot. Nafisa would cry with her. Sometimes she would ask me, "*Bhai*, *amma* will get well, won't she?"

I would reassure her. But one day Aunt died. Nafisa began suffering from depression. I spent all my free time trying to cheer her up. The relative who had looked after my aunt tried to revive her spirits, but it seemed obvious that Nafisa was not going to live very long.

Nafisa's death, and my dismissal, occurred on the same day. The two tragedies together had a numbing effect on me. I was overwhelmed by a kind of sluggishness and didn't grieve in any meaningful way.

A few people continued to find their way to our place hoping to meet with Uncle. At first I would turn them away. One day I saw Uncle's notebooks. Inside, there were many different *amals*, carefully written. I cleaned out the front room and took his chair.

Uncle's notebooks have stayed with me. Slowly, patients have started to trickle in. Uncle's well-known name helps too, and I'm making good progress.

I met the bride one more time. A neighbor's boy came to me and said, "A woman wants to meet you."

"Send her here," I said.

"I told her to do that," he said, "but she refuses to come in. She was in fact asking for Nafisa *bibi*."

After a little hesitation I went with the boy. She was sitting on a broken bench in a deserted park near my house. She was wearing a black burqa, her face barely visible. I recognized her. Faltering, I asked her to come home. But she did not consent.

"I was longing to see Nafisa," she said, "but this boy tells me that she also ..."

"Yes, she too," I said, "she was the last to go."

She sat and cried for a while, then inquired about Nafisa's illness, etc. After that she got up to go. It all happened so quickly that I couldn't talk about other things, and walking with measured steps she left the park. □

—Translated by Mehr Afshan Farooqi

Glossary and Notes

amul (ʿamīl): an occultist, a practitioner of magical charms.

jafr or *jafar*: The art of making prophecies based on the book of *jafr* said to have been written by the Shi'a Imam Ja'far as-Šādiq.

Ja'far as-Šādiq (circa 700–65), son of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, is regarded amongst Shi'as as one of the greatest of the Imams and as the teacher of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) par excellence. To Imam Ja'far have been attributed numerous utterances defining Shi'a doctrine, as well as prayers and homilies. He has been ascribed authorship of numerous books dealing especially with divination, magic and alchemy, of which the most famous is the mysterious *jafr*. The use of *jafr* was probably first connected with apocalyptic speculations about the return of the Hidden Imam, Muḥammad al-Mahdī—who disappeared in 874—and similar events. Later it grew into an art in which the mixing and substitution of the numerical value of letters was used to veil or reveal hidden matters or guarantee success in prayers. For example, the numerical value of Allah is 66; thus the Divine Name had to be repeated 66 times in a certain prayer, and so on.

naqsh: a delineation, an imprint, usually with invisible ink or special ink, when used for making a magic square or a charm. There are vessels inscribed with quotations from the Qu'ran that are filled with water (which is then regarded as blessed) to be used in case of illness. Similarly, ink washed off scraps of Qur'anic verses or prayers when immersed in a cup of water is believed to have a soothing effect.

raml or *ramal*: the art of divining by drawing lines or figures in sand or on the ground.

Allam and Son*

I KNOW NOW—well, I knew even before—that a man, after reaching a certain age, begins to forget several thousand, indeed several hundred thousand things each day, but the realization that some of his memory is being lost takes several years to sink in. Because the store of memories is so large, even the continual disappearance of thousands and hundreds of thousands of objects from it scarcely inclines him to suspect, at least not for a while, any appreciable loss. And so, well before the term of my employment ended, I had already accepted that, although I wasn't conscious of it, I was forgetting quite a number of things every day. Then, in a fit of something resembling stupidity, I wasted a great deal of time launching fruitless efforts to remember everything I was forgetting. Then I made a concerted effort and managed to pull myself out of that fit. Not long afterward, I was seized by another, even greater, fit of stupidity during which I wasted my time calling to mind all the things that were still intact in my memory. This wasn't a fruitless enterprise, yet it didn't yield anything other than confusion.

While engaged in this activity my employment finally reached its end, leaving me plenty of time to waste. After I had frittered away an inordinate amount of time in this pursuit it dawned on me that the amount I still retained in my memory was impossible to determine. I remembered a lot of things, hardly any of which were extraordinary. And even those few extraordinary things began to appear quite ordinary during an episode of weariness which took hold of me. Finally I gave up this pastime altogether.

Later my memory became even weaker. I no longer felt a need to remember what I was forgetting. Things that I recalled remembering

*"Allam aur Bēṭā," from quarterly *Āj*, No. 33 (2001), pp. 61–73.

quite well—people's names, their faces, details of past events, and many other big and little things—none of these could be recollected despite straining my mind. Right about that time, or maybe shortly thereafter—I can't say for sure—my memory even started to goof. I'd call one friend by the name of some other friend, or take an acquaintance that I was meeting after some lapse of time for another acquaintance, or mix the details of certain events in with the details of others. Often this created difficulties, but that didn't bother me too much. I was already expecting that to happen and was quite prepared to accept it.

But even in those days numerous memories of my childhood and adolescence remained fresh in my mind. The children in my household would eagerly listen to me recount the stories of those times in my life and marvel at how well I remembered things from so long ago. I knew that even in the waning years of life, when one tended to forget things that only happened a couple of days ago, the mind still retained memories of childhood intact.

At about this time I once fell ill when the seasons were changing. I ran a high fever for several days and the children were stopped from coming to see me. When I recovered I was told how I had rambled on non-stop in the delirium brought on by the fever. I was also told that, with my eyes closed, I mostly recounted the same stories of my childhood that the children insisted on hearing from me, except that I told those stories in much greater detail than ever before.

At that point I discovered that I also no longer remembered anything from my childhood.

That, I was not prepared to accept. So, I went through a third fit of stupidity: I would have the children tell me the very same stories I myself used to tell them. When this didn't help, I worked my mind harder, trying to remember my childhood. When even that didn't help, I thought up another trick. Before I was taken ill some scene or other would occasionally flash through my mind, and it wouldn't take me long to remember which memory of my childhood it corresponded to. So now I would lie down at night well before sleeping time and close my eyes, emptying my mind, as well as I could, of all thoughts. Then I would try to see something in the darkness of my closed eyes. Usually this didn't work and I fell asleep during the exercise. But sometimes a faint blur of light appeared somewhere in that darkness and revealed some static image just for a moment. I was certain that these images were part of my childhood memories. Beyond this conviction, I wasn't able to get much else out of this pastime since, no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't relate any

image to its corresponding memory. Then again, the images were strangely vague: sometimes it might be a bullock-cart parked under the dense foliage of a tree, its image rippling over a puddle of rainwater; sometimes a fakir with a small kettledrum in his hand; and sometimes large, copper-plated metal cooking pots on brick hearths in an unpaved courtyard half lying in sunshine and surrounded by canvas tents. There used to be many images of clothing, both men's and women's and of various styles, but the faces of the people wearing the clothing couldn't be seen, or maybe they became dim and faded away completely by the time my eyes reached them. This old-fashioned clothing was of an elegant style and shape, and usually of bright, loud colors, with pink, turquoise, yellow, and purple predominating, but they were never black.

However, one night, I saw a scrap of black cloth form and quickly disappear on top of slowly fading colorful clothing. This image returned to me several times that night and again the following night, though on the latter occasion the scrap of black cloth remained visible a little longer and I recognized it. This was also an item of clothing made by ripping about a hand-and-a-half long slit in a length of unstitched cloth. It was worn by putting one's head through the slit and letting one end of the cloth hang in front and the other in back. Sleeveless and open on either side, this attire was usually white and was reminiscent of the *kafan*, the shroud draped around a dead body. It was called *kafni*—even though those who wore it were very much alive—and it was only rarely seen.

The black *kafni* disappeared and then reappeared. This time I could see, unlike with the other clothing, a slight movement in it, as if the body of the one wearing it was quaking. Then, even before it had become dim, the image vanished altogether, and my body began to shake at about the same time. I waited a long while for the *kafni* to reappear, but it didn't, nor did any other kind of clothing.

After this the images ceased to appear. Now when I closed my eyes I couldn't even see a blank spot. And so, the game of watching images, which I had played over the course of several nights, ended and I once again resorted to going to bed only after sleep had completely overwhelmed my eyes.

I had no way left to kill time at home now, so I started going out again to stroll around or visit with friends and talk with them about this and that. This used to be my daily, or almost daily, routine, but ever since the start of the grievously erratic behavior of my memory—which often displeased

my friends, and just as often led to my own embarrassment before my acquaintances and sometimes even exposed me to their ridicule—I had terminated it. However now, after my illness, when I started socializing with them again they would tell me stories of their own lapses of memory.

One day I was sitting with my friends. We were talking about errors that we had made in identifying people. Now and then we laughed heartily. Just then one of the friends said, "Well, it doesn't bother me as much when I mistake an acquaintance for a stranger. I usually get away by apologizing. But when I mistake a stranger for an acquaintance ..."

So then we started talking about that. Just about everyone related a story of his own involving this experience. Some stories were pretty long and really interesting.

"Yes, something like that has also started happening to me quite often these days," a friend, who had been quiet for a while, said, "but this past week I had a very strange experience." He stopped, resuming a little later, "I saw this fine fellow off in the distance in the Old Market," he pointed at one of the friends, "only to find out when I got near that it was somebody else. ..."

"Let me tell you what happened next," the friend who had been pointed at said. "This other man also mistook you for one of his friends, and for a very long time both of you ..."

"At least let me finish," the first friend said. "Anyway, on coming closer I realized that it wasn't you, but after I had walked just a few steps I saw that you really were approaching—in the flesh, with this same exact miserable face of yours."

Suddenly I recalled that similar coincidences had happened to me many times, so many times that they couldn't be called coincidences; in fact, it never happened that I mistook a stranger for an acquaintance and then didn't see that very same acquaintance shortly afterward. If he took a while to appear I would begin to feel restless, but in the end I would definitely see him. This was the most extraordinary thing in my life, although I never did remember it during the time when I used to count the things that still survived in my memory.

My friends were still talking. Just about everyone had had such an experience, though not more than once.

"Yes," I said after hearing their stories, "something like that has also happened to me."

But I didn't recount any of my experiences. In a way, I sort of regretted that they had experienced something similar, even though it was only once.

Then our conversation meandered off to other topics.

A week later, I was roaming around an old market, which used to be called the Big Market, with a friend I had played with in childhood. Following a few days of close, stuffy rainy weather, bright sunshine had appeared, and the sky was absolutely clear. Just as we were talking about this change in the weather, or rather about the weather before the change, the sunshine began to fade and the atmosphere became even more dreary than it had been during the preceding days. Looking glum, my friend said, "Can't understand the way these clouds just wander in all of a sudden."

"Nor where they suddenly disappear," I said.

Just then I saw a bearded man clothed in black off in the distance coming toward us. Something snapped in my mind and the word, "Allam" escaped from my lips.

I broke out laughing.

"Allam?" my friend asked.

"What—you've forgotten Allam?" I asked, although the fact was that I had only remembered him just then.

"Who can forget Allam?" my friend said. "Anyway, what makes you suddenly think of that poor soul?"

The man was drawing closer to us. When he was only a few steps away, I examined him more carefully. He didn't look at all like Allam. With the sleeves of his long loose black shirt rolled up almost to his shoulders and his big collyrium-smeared eyes, he looked a bit like the caretaker of a shrine. He swept past us. My friend was saying something and I turned my attention to him. He said the same thing over again, "Who can forget Allam?"

"I had forgotten him," I said.

"Don't tell me you've forgotten his little bear too."

"His son? Oh, that wolf? Yes, I remember him. He bit you."

"He practically took a snip out of my flesh—the miserable wretch! Here, look," he showed me the mark from the wound on his right wrist.

We began to talk about Allam. I remembered quite a few things about him myself, and about others my friend jogged my memory. But one thing which I made him remember was that Allam was always seen wearing a *kafui* made of some black fabric.

He used to visit my father now and then. If he found me playing near the gate of our house, he would call out to me from the distance, "Young Master, please inform the Deputy Sahib that Allam, the rascal, is here to pay his respects."

My father wasn't any kind of "Deputy" at all. He used to teach at the biggest school in the city. He maintained himself in the manner of high government officials in keeping with the grandeur of the school, and he always went out in his own carriage. That's why the residents of our neighborhood—mostly people of modest means with little education—called him "Deputy Sahib." When I would inform him about Allam's arrival, he would come out on the veranda and he would talk to him for a long time, either standing out there or after ushering him into the outer reception room. He would also mention Allam to our family and tell us that Allam was his boyhood friend and also his classmate at school for a while. I found out from my father that Allam was the scion of a prominent and well-respected religious family in the city and that he was very clever in his studies but had fallen in with bad company. His continual disobedience and intransigence eventually drove his father to throw him out of the house and later to disown him publicly. After that his hoodliganism got out of hand and he could usually be seen hanging out with a gang of crooks notorious throughout the city. These lawbreakers specialized in kidnapping women; and Allam, mixed up in their antics as he was, was sometimes dragged off to the police lockup because of his association with them. He would let this be known to us somehow or other and my father would get him released on his own recognizance. He would come straight to our place after being released and, seeing me playing at the gate of our house, he would always say the exact same thing: "Young Master, please inform the Deputy Sahib that Allam, the rascal, is here to pay his respects."

The odd thing about him was that he really didn't look like a rascal at all. He only looked like somebody mysterious, at least to me. His black *kafni*, his black sarong, and his thick round black beard made it difficult to form an accurate opinion about him. The way he looked, he could easily be taken for a harmless man, except that he always carried a small hatchet with him, its edge covered in a sheath of some black cloth. While no one may have ever seen the blade unsheathed, just about everyone knew that Allam carried the hatchet in order to defend himself against jungle animals, and this was precisely how it became known to me that there were jungles around my city.

He caught all kinds of animals in these jungles and brought them to the market. Perhaps this was what he did for a living. I would often see him standing in a certain spot in the market, holding a tope tied around the neck or waist of a dozing animal while people crowded around him. I would join the crowd and gawk in amazement at each animal he brought there. One day I saw him there with a *bijju*—an animal, which it is said, digs into fresh graves and feeds on dead bodies and so is also called *qabar bijju*. In the same way, I saw my first hedgehog, which I found to be much smaller than I had imagined. Up until then I had only seen hedgehog quills, which are used for magic and for charms, in roadside displays set up by medicine men. I also saw many other animals, some of whose names I had heard and others whose names I had never heard, and still others whose names even Allam himself didn't know.

One day I saw him standing in his usual place with a length of tope coiled around his neck and its two ends dangling over his chest. I saw long scratch marks on his arms and his *kafni* was also torn in several places. He appeared very animated as he related to the people gathered around him how he had heard the slight sound of movement inside of a dark jungle cavern and plunged into it fearlessly. As he was trying to see in the darkness, some animal had suddenly pounced on him and, after mauling him, had disappeared behind one of the curves inside the cavern.

"So I headed back home too," he said, stroking his hatchet gently, "but on my way out I did tell him, 'Well, Mister, you got me today, but watch out, I'm coming after you one of these days and then I'll let you have it. For now, enjoy your cozy hideout.'"

And sure enough, the very next week a much bigger crowd than ever before could be seen gathered around him. From what the people in the crowd were saying, I gathered that he had actually captured *that* animal and brought it along. People were trying to figure out what kind of animal it was. When I tried to get through the crowd, I was stopped, and so was every other child who tried to get through that day. I went to one side and tried to get some idea what the animal looked like from the conversations that were going on. I was able to gather just this: that it had strange-looking claws, that it was dozing just like every other animal brought here by Allam, and that it was a female. Suddenly I heard screams. People began to fall over one another, and Allam's voice rose above the stampede, "Hatchet ... my hatchet!"

The stampede, and even more so those beastly screams, scared me so much that I immediately took off.

That was probably the last time that Allam brought an animal from the wild to the market. Later I saw him four or five times after long intervals wandering around all alone. Toward the end of this period his beard had begun to look scraggly and rather unsightly, and he had also started to rotter a bit. He had also dropped his visits to us. New and more interesting people absorbed my attention in the Big Market. Now I was reminded of Allam only when I sometimes spotted his son along my way. He had grown up into a strapping youth and closely resembled his father.

He was my age, and now and then he joined in with the boys I used to play with in my childhood. However, our group tried to keep our distance from him because he was quick to lose his temper, and when he did he would bite his adversary. God knows how the rumor had spread among us children that wolves carried him away shortly after he was born and that Allam had searched for him in the jungle for several years until finally he retrieved him. Some of the older boys in our group even went so far as to say, or rather, they actually claimed to have witnessed with their own eyes, that even after returning home Allam's son walked on all fours for quite a while and only ate raw meat. Another boy said that around this time imprints of a wolf's claws were discovered near Allam's house and Allam had started to keep a hatchet with him at all times ever since. We decided that the boys were telling the truth and so we started to fear Allam's son. However, I never had any fights with him. He himself avoided rangling with me, perhaps because he sometimes tagged along with his father to our house. Sometimes he also came alone and told my father in rears, "Father has been locked up."

A few years into his youth his beard had become quite thick and round and now and then he also wore a black *kafui*. Seeing him, one felt that old Allam had become young all over again. But he scarcely ever greeted me then; perhaps he went by me without even recognizing me.

After this a passing thought came to me a couple of times that I hadn't even seen Allam's son anywhere for quite a while.

I was feeling a sense of satisfaction that some parts of my memory had returned. I tried to remember other things from that period and, I must say, I did succeed nominally in my effort. Just then I suddenly realized that my friend had left me at some turning point in the road. I had been out for quite a while. I immediately headed back, partly because of the thought that my over long absence would be causing everyone at home to worry and partly because the increasing darkness made it difficult for me to see distant things clearly. Just after I had gone past the intersection nearest to my house, I again saw the fellow who looked like

the caretaker of a shrine—or should I say, I saw his outfit—standing on the other side of the road. Again I thought it was Allam and again I laughed involuntarily. Then I remembered Allam's son and my laugh quickly faded.

The next day again I saw him standing in the same place. Although I was on the opposite side of the road, I tried to look him over a bit more closely in the light of the sun. He wasn't the same man who was clad in black and had eyes smeared with collyrium that I had seen in the Big Market the day before. During the next few days I saw him several times. He would be standing quietly, in the exact same spot, and glancing at the passersby. I also noticed that he was wearing a *kafai*. But when I passed by him closely a couple of times, he looked at me indifferently, just as he did at others.

Right about that time one of the children in our family told me that I talked to myself when I walked down the road. This was bad news and my family had, perhaps knowingly, kept it from me. I considered people who talked to themselves eccentric, and even beyond eccentric, irrational. I stopped going out so often, and when I did go out I kept wondering the whole way whether I was talking to myself. In doing so, I often lost track of my surroundings.

One day, as I was returning home, I had the sneaky feeling, after I had walked a little ways past the intersection, that I had just said something to myself. I stopped rather suddenly and started to think of what I had said. Right then I heard a voice coming from behind my back, "May you remain safe! May you remain safe!"

Then I heard the sound of something wooden drop. I turned around to look. The man in the *kafai* was coming toward me holding out both of his hands to greet me. But after taking just a couple of steps he staggered and it appeared as if he was trying to go in several directions all at the same time. Then he fell to the ground. Quite a few passersby rushed toward him and so did I. We managed to stand him on his feet but his entire body was trembling, and in that state he mumbled, as if to himself, "Can't walk. I just stand." It seemed that he was beginning to drift into unconsciousness.

None of the passersby knew him, and none seemed to know what to do with him. Finally I said, "I know him. Please take him to my place."

Those people knew me. Several of them practically carried him to my house, and I had them seat him in a chair.

After the people were gone I was thinking of something to say to him when, still sitting in the chair, he began slumping to one side in such a

way that two legs of the chair lifted up off the floor. I lunged forward and caught him before he fell over. He also made some effort to steady himself and said, "I can't sit either. I can only stand or lie down."

There was nothing in the room which he could lie down on. I was thinking that I would have somebody bring over a cot from inside the house or spread some bedding right there on the floor. Meanwhile, he stood up, supporting himself on me. He straightened up and said, "Now let go."

His body quivered slightly, and I asked, "You won't fall down?"

"No. I'll just stand."

"If you'd like to lie down, I could have a bed ..."

"No. I'll stand."

Slowly I let go of him. He did indeed stand in place without wobbling. Then, with a trace of pride in his voice, he said, "I can stand all day long. Just like this."

My problem, on the other hand, was that walking didn't tire me as much as standing, but I suppressed the desire to sit down in a chair and asked him, "How long have you had this ailment?"

"Oh, many years," he said indifferently.

After that he kept squinting his eyes and looking at the room over and over for some time. Finally he said, "It's changed."

"So have times," I said, and then asked, "How's your father?"

"My father—oh, he's been dead a long time."

"What did he die of?"

"Old age—what else?" he answered, again with the same indifference. He ran a sweeping glance over the room once more and said, "It's changed quite a bit. When I used to come here ..." He changed the subject and informed me, "I don't see well either."

Has this man already resigned himself to everything? I asked myself feeling rather envious of him. Then I asked, "Who had you come to the intersection with?"

"Oh, yes," he said with a start, as if suddenly remembering something, "she must have come to get me. She's probably feeling terribly worried."

"Shall I send someone to look for her?"

Just then footsteps were heard on the veranda and a boy from the neighborhood pecked in through the door and said to someone, "He's here all right. There, standing."

A woman wrapped up in a burqa was right behind the boy. The boy left. The woman stepped inside the room hesitantly. The moment she

spotted my guest she said in a sharp tone of voice, "I was sick with worry. You'd better stay home from now on."

"What's the problem?" he said unfazed. "This too is out home." Then he pointed at me; "I'm indebted to him for many, many favots. When I was locked up in this business with you, he was the one who bailed me out." At that point the woman greeted me.

The sound of footsteps on the veranda was heard once again. The same boy entered, holding a hatchet, its edge sheathed in its cover. "It had fallen there," he said, handing the hatchet over to the woman. Then he left the room.

I stood silently for quite some time. He too was standing perfectly erect and silent, but his head was bowed and his eyes were closed. I looked at him closely and then I heard the woman say, "Please wake him. He falls asleep standing up, just like that."

I wasn't surprised. A *pahari* watchman in my neighborhood also used to doze off for a bit standing on his feet. He used to say that, for him, just a few snatches of sleep like that made up for an entire night. I looked at the woman. She seemed to be in a hurry to leave; still, I asked her, "Where's his son these days?"

"That's the source of all the trouble," the woman said. "He slept at home in his bed one night and in the morning the bed was found empty. Since then he goes out looking for him every single day. He can't walk, so I hold him and take him out. He stands for hours on end, sometimes on this street and sometimes on that. He even insists on going to the jungle. Now tell me, please, where can I find a jungle for him. A long time ago he used to go to the jungle and catch animals. Once some animal ..."

He was still dozing, but now he woke up with a start and snapped at the woman. "What are you telling him? Doesn't he know already?"

The woman fell silent. I asked, "Where does he live?"

She told me that his house was in a lane behind my house and that more than half of it had already collapsed. It was reached by going through a number of narrow lanes. The woman described its location in detail, but I forgot it before I could memorize it. In back of my house there was a veritable network of narrow, dimly lit lanes, some of which were even covered by roofs. I had only heard the names of some of these lanes, covered or uncovered, and hadn't even heard the names of some others. I remembered what my father used to say: the lanes of our neighborhood are as twisted as the human brain is inside the skull, and a stranger, caught in this maze can hardly hope to get out of it on his own. I was already feeling caught in this maze; or rather, my efforts to get out

were proving unsuccessful. Just then the woman said to him, "OK, will you come along now? Don't you see, he's been standing so long on your account?"

"Thank you very kindly, very kindly," he said, making a parting gesture to me with both of his hands, and then, holding onto the woman, he started to hobble out of the room. Suddenly he stopped, felt around his body with his hand and said anxiously, "Harcher ... my harcher."

"Here, I have it," the woman said handing the harchet over to him.

I accompanied the two of them as far as the gate of my house. He was saying something as he was leaving but his voice sounded muffled. Perhaps he was blessing me too. All I remember are the words he spoke when he reached the gate: "I didn't see the Young Master. He must have grown quite a bit by now. God be praised." □

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*

The Big Garbage Dump*

1

THE BIG GARBAGE DUMP was located inside a building dating from royal times. It couldn't be said who owned it, or what its original purpose was, or precisely when it was converted into a garbage dump. All that could be said with certainty was that now it was the personal property of no one, that it was not built for the collection of garbage, and that no one had seen it in its pre-dump state.

It was difficult to even call it a building because what little could be seen now was something like a *dalan* with five small passageways and with three serrated arches visible behind it. These arches were also so filled with garbage that only their uppermost serratures were left open, a yawning darkness apparent behind them at all times. New garbage was dumped in this very *dalan*. Whatever had lain on the *dalan*'s roof and behind its arches had been used as filler for the main highway which passed right above the building. It was the longest and the straightest thoroughfare, starting in the north, continuing for a long distance, and disappearing in the deserted areas of the south. In royal times, when the crowded neighborhoods located in the low-lying areas and those standing on the elevations were connected by narrow twisting lanes that rose and fell, one could not even imagine such a long, straight and level highway right in the middle of the city. It was built after the demise of the kingdom and extensive demolition took place to reclaim space in order to build it. All the residential neighborhoods—and they were large in number—standing in its path were torn down, and all the houses standing on the elevations were toppled onto those in the low-lying areas to ensure

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that the surface was perfectly level, so now the highway passed over them easily.

The demolished neighborhoods survived only as names in old writings and official documents, but many old neighborhoods that had not fallen in the highway's path still endured. All these surviving neighborhoods were located in the low-lying areas of the city and were connected by a network of new and old lanes. Some neighborhoods were situated in such low-lying areas that the lanes leading to them had been built in the form of broad staircases, and such was the narrow lane that came to its end in front of the Big Garbage Dump. The stairs always appeared wet, but nobody knew where the water that dampened them came from. The lowest staircase eased into a long lane which, although it eventually headed south, proceeded in a westerly direction parallel to the highway but a little lower than it. Some distance up ahead this lane merged with a paved road that forked off from the highway toward the west. Like the staired lane, this lane was also usually deserted. Even children, big and small, who created a ruckus from morning until evening playing in the other lanes of the area, didn't step into this one. Why, even their noise didn't reach here. The only exception was that at first light some grubby-looking kids, with large jute sacks slung across their backs and carrying sticks in their hands that had hooked wires attached on the ends, emerged from the two lanes and converged on the Garbage Dump. They poked through the garbage using their wire hooks to pick up plastic bags buried under the trash and then they deposited these in their sacks. The only other visitors to the lanes were the stray cats, dogs, and unwanted cattle that came to the dump foraging for food. Their numbers increased significantly after the leftovers from a banquet had been thrown out there, with crows joining in.

Just now, though, nothing fit for eating could be spotted, yet a gangly dog, half buried in the garbage piled up in the lowest passageway, was frantically trying to pull something out from underneath. It was jerking its body repeatedly and rapidly wagging its tail as it attempted to hold its ground firmly with its hind legs. As a result, some of the trash on the upper part of the pile had begun to slide down. Suddenly the wagging stopped. The dog shuddered slightly and, jerking its body forcefully one last time, pulled its mouth out of the garbage. But the mouth was empty. The dog backed off a few steps and barked repeatedly, snatching at the trash over and over. Then it quieted down and, with its neck hung in humble resignation, it climbed up the stairs of the lane and dropped out of sight. Moments later its piercing howl rose from near the last stair at

the very top and a man with a muffler wrapped around his neck was seen slowly coming down the stairs.

Carrying his briefcase in one hand and pulling up the bottoms of his trouser legs with the other, he passed by three passageways of the dump, but at the fourth he began to shudder and came to a halt. Standing perfectly still for a few moments, he twisted his neck around and looked toward the dump. His body turned slowly and he took a couple of steps toward the stairs, but then stopped again. He looked first at one end of the dump and then at the other. His body turned around again and, walking briskly forward, he went into the other lane. He turned left and walked even more briskly. Suddenly his feet slowed down. He let go of his trouser legs and shifted his briefcase to his other hand as he proceeded slowly toward the lane's southern exit. The gangly dog's bark rose behind him. Perhaps it was back at the dump.

By now the man in the scarf was coming up on the small paan and cigarette shop located right at the lane's exit. Opposite from it was the government office building that had no name and seemed in need of repairs. He acknowledged the greetings of the paanwala, glanced down the street in both directions, shook his head without there being any solicitations from the paanwala, crossed the street and entered the office. The old attendant who was sitting on a long bench next to the door of the room on the left-hand side stood up immediately and greeted him. Taking the man's briefcase from his hand, he dutifully opened the door for him. Walking behind the man, he entered the room and cleaned off the desk with a rag that was draped over his shoulder. By then the man had already taken his seat behind the desk. The attendant placed the briefcase before him and said, "Sahib, it's very chilly!"

"Yes. The chill has increased somewhat today," the man answered. Then he said, "Rahmatullah, bring some water."

"Water, Sahib?" the attendant said. He wanted to say something more but didn't. Turning around, he went out of the room.

The man pulled the briefcase closer and placed his thumbs on the clasps. The jarring noise of both fasteners opening almost simultaneously was heard, followed by the muffled sounds of their being closed one at a time. He pushed the briefcase to one side and then removed his scarf and wiped his face with it. He looked at the attendant walking in with the water, took the glass from his hand and drank all of it, one mouthful at a time. He put the glass down on the desk and said, "Send Ghayas in."

The attendant picked up the glass and wiped away the wet spot with his rag. Just as he was going out the door, in walked a young man.

"Ghayas Babu, Sahib would like to see you," he told the young man as he went out. The young man greeted the other man and said, "It has really become quite cold, Sir."

"Yes, yesterday already."

"Looks like it's going to rain too."

"Yes, already yesterday the clouds started to gather," the man said and pointed to the chair in front of him.

After the young man was seated, the man at the desk continued opening and closing the fasteners on his briefcase for some time. The young man looked at him with inquiring eyes and asked, "Sir, shall I send for tea?"

The man shook his head no. He snapped open the fasteners once more, lifted the flap and looked at it for a while, and then turned his attention to the young man. "I've brought the papers along," he said, patting the briefcase. "I've arranged them all in separate files. Now we need to make a list of the items. You may do it here or at home, your home or mine."

"Wherever you say, Sir."

"First study them," the man said, pointing to a chair on the right side of the desk.

"Yes, Sir," the young man said as he got up from his chair.

"They've really added up to quite a volume," the man said glancing at the files stuffed in the briefcase. "You'll probably need to make a fairly long list."

"Consider it done, Sir," the young man said, and then he asked, "By when, Sir?"

"Whenever it's finished," the man said. "You've already seen the papers, but ... you must study them. First of all ..." he pulled a file out of the briefcase, "these are complete now. Make a list of these first. Have a look at the papers on top too."

The young man took the file from him and opened it. He examined the papers that lay at the very top for a while and then said rather playfully, "Well, now nothing stands in the way of gaining possession. Congratulations, Sir!"

"On gaining possession of a garbage dump, Ghayas?"

The young man felt a bit embarrassed. Placing his hand on the top-most paper he said, "But, Sir, it wasn't a garbage dump." He lifted the paper in his hand. "This document clearly shows that the building belonged to your family."

"You probably haven't examined the paper carefully, Ghayas," the man said. "In fact, it was taken from another family and then passed on to us. Today, times have changed and that other family also has a claim to it."

The young man looked up and saw that the other man's eyes were fixed on him intently.

"But, Sir ..."

"Read it again, Ghayas."

The young man started to read, faltering. Meanwhile, the other man kept looking at him as his hands opened and closed the clasps of the briefcase.

"But, Sir," said the young man after he had read the paper and was returning it to the file, "the members of that family ... they're all gone."

"Try to understand the difference between 'gone' and 'disappeared,' Ghayas. Why are you forgetting your friend?"

"My friend, Sir?"

"The one who disappeared ..."

"Ayaz, Sir?" the young man asked, and then suddenly became a trifle melancholy.

"He's the lone survivor of that family, just as I am of mine."

"But he's disappeared, Sir."

"Try to understand the difference between 'gone' and 'disappeared,' Ghayas," the man said, emphasizing each word.

The young man sat speechless while the man took the file from his hand, slipped it into the briefcase and closed the flap. The young man pulled the briefcase ever so slowly toward himself. "Shall I take it with me, Sir?"

"One other thing," the man said as he reached for the briefcase. He opened it and pulled out a bundle that was below several files. "Here, this is the list I started myself ..."

"I'll look it over, Sir," Ghayas said as he stretched his arm forward. But the man put the bundle back under the files.

"Listen, Ghayas," he said softly and fell silent.

The young man put both of his hands on the desk and leaned forward a little. "Yes, Sir."

"I ended up going there again today."

Signs of concern began to appear on the young man's face.

"Why did you, Sir ...?" he said, "when you know ..."

"I wasn't thinking," the man said. "It was getting late. I'd become accustomed to taking the shorter route."

"So then, Sir," the young man started, hesitantly, "today again ...?"

"Yes, a slight pain started."

"And that ... the shudder?"

"That too. It was the shudder that made me conscious that I'd wandered there," the man said nonchalantly. "Anyway, let's just drop it."

"Sometimes a shadow of doubt sweeps over the heart, Sir," the young man said, "How many times have I asked you ..."

"OK, I'll have myself looked at by someone one of these days," the man said, again nonchalantly. "Here, the list which I made ..."

The man stopped midway as he was pulling the bundle slightly forward from under the files. He pushed it back and closed the flap. The young man looked at him questioningly. The sound of the fasteners snapping shut was heard.

"Listen, Ghayas," the man said once more, and then once more he remained silent for quite a while.

"Sir?" the young man finally said.

"He was quite close to you."

"Who, Sir?" the young man asked, again feeling melancholy. "He was a childhood friend, Sir."

"Did he sometimes talk to you about the Garbage Dump?"

"The Garbage Dump?"

"About living there."

"Near the dump, Sir?"

"No, inside it."

The young man's sadness changed to surprise and then back to sadness.

"Why are you asking that, Sir?"

The man played with the fasteners for some time. Finally he said, "Ghayas, I have this feeling that he lives there now."

"Ayaz?" the young man said. "Ayaz? Living inside the Garbage Dump, Sir?"

"Did he say anything to you?"

"To me, Sir?"

"Never mind," the man said nonchalantly as before. "We'll talk about it more fully some other time."

"Nobody can live inside the Garbage Dump," the young man said, perhaps to himself.

"How can you say that?"

The young man stared at the surface of the desk in silence. The other man shifted to one side of his chair. Pushing his body slightly sideways,

he took out a bunch of keys from the pocket of his trousers and placed it on top of his briefcase.

"A few vouchers are still hanging from yesterday and need to be expedited," he told the young man.

The young man was now standing in front of the cabinet which stood against the right-hand wall. The faint clinking of keys colliding with each other was heard almost at the same time as the muffled voice of the man, "Never mind, Ghayas."

The young man turned around to look and then rushed over to the desk. The man's head was leaning against the back of the chair and his face was covered with heavy beads of sweat. Before long his body began to slump to one side. The young man moved forward quickly and steadied it. "Sir!" that's all he could say, two or three times. Bending forward, he peered into the man's eyes. Then he let go of the body and backed away suddenly. The man's body slumped forward. The young man again stepped forward and steadied it as he called out loudly, "Rahmatullah, quick, bring some water."

He peered into the man's eyes. His grip relaxed a little. The man's body began to fall forward and his head came to rest on the briefcase lying in front of him on the desk. Abandoning him, the young man darted toward the door, but halfway there he turned around and again tried to make the man sit properly in the chair. Meanwhile the attendant entered with some water. He stopped at the door looking at both men for a while, then he approached the desk. He bent over and looked into the man's eyes. "Sahib is no more, Ghayas Babu," he informed the young man.

But the young man continued trying to make the man sit properly. Perhaps he hadn't seen anyone die before that day.

2

I hadn't seen anyone die before that day. Looking at Beg Sahib's eyes I could see that he was no longer alive, but I couldn't bring myself to believe that he was actually dead. Rahmatullah was an experienced man. Before even putting the glass of water on the desk he told me that Beg Sahib was dead. Holding Beg Sahib's shoulders, he had lowered his head until it came to rest on his briefcase. The two of us just stood there looking at him for a while and then I told Rahmatullah that Beg Sahib had been talking as usual and had been quite all right.

"He wasn't quite all right, Ghayas Babu," Rahmatullah said. "I was already alarmed when he asked for water in such terrible cold."

I glanced at the head resting on the briefcase, so did Rahmatullah, then he said, "You stay with the body so I can go let other people know."

"No, you stay here. I'm leaving."

Rahmatullah gave me a somber look. "Won't you stay a while longer, Ghayas Babu?" Other people will be here soon."

I hadn't thought about the other office workers. Before long I heard their voices coming from other rooms. Rahmatullah dashed out, said something to somebody and returned. Within minutes Beg Sahib's office was filled with people, and Khairat Khan was among them. Before coming to the office Beg Sahib used to stop at his shop without fail to savor a paan. It was Khairat Khan who had Rahmatullah's bench brought in and had Beg Sahib's body placed on it. The office people had laid him out on his desk.

It took me some time to explain the details of Beg Sahib's death to the others. I didn't mention anything about the Garbage Dump or about Ayaz so there wasn't much left to tell them. Nevertheless, however much there was, I had to tell it over and over, and I also had to hear it all repeated back to me. This done, I went to Beg Sahib's house.

The news had already reached there before I did. Chairs were being set out in the lane across from the house. Neighbors had started to trickle in. Most of the people appeared indifferent to one another, and certainly to me. I myself was indifferent to everyone because I didn't know them. And yet I watched all of them as I sat in my chair. Some people seemed quite knowledgeable about funeral arrangements so they were deciding among themselves who would do what. Just then somebody said, "Leave that to me, but first shouldn't the body be brought from the office?"

"I think it'll be here any minute," some other man replied.

At that point I thought: what am I doing here? I came to give the news, didn't I? And the news has been given. Even so, I lingered a while longer. Finally I got up and went back to the office only to find that it was already closed. Khairat Khan was also closing his shop. When he saw me he said, "The body has left, Ghayas Mian." Then he pointed at the lane. "If you go this way perhaps you will catch up with it somewhere along the way."

I immediately stepped into the lane and, without considering that there was no point in rushing, I walked quickly until I came to the bend in the stairs of the lane. As soon as my glance fell on the Garbage Dump, my feet slowed down. The upper layer of garbage always changed yet it

always appeared the same, and even now I didn't notice any difference. The animals and the brats who poked around for plastic bags never looked any different either. There were neither bags nor brats at that moment, but there was an emaciated dog that was doing its damndest to yank out an empty sweetmeat box stuck in the garbage. Just above the box, two baskets made from bamboo strips were beginning to become dislodged from their place. High above all of this, a few strands had slipped down from a pile of marigold garlands. One of the strands of marigold lodged on the dog's back and he was trying to get rid of it by shaking his body repeatedly, though most of his attention was focused on the box.

The *dalan* was nearly filled with garbage, but the three arches in back of it were still slightly open at the top as usual. I peered into the darkness behind these openings for quite a while. I remembered Ayaz. And the days of my friendship with him. I also recalled that from the start he was my only friend. On exactly the same day, we had both entered a mediocre school run by the city administration, and we weren't just fellow-sufferers in this new calamity, we were also fellow-comforters. We received education—or rather punishment, to be more accurate—at this school for several years. Punishment because we had both developed the habit of skipping school. When we did that we sometimes went to the Garbage Dump and looked at all the cast off items there. This refuse also included perfectly useable things that had been dumped simply because they had gotten old. We fought hard against the impulse to pick up such things and consciously trampled over them with the old, decayed garbage below sinking and rising beneath our feet. At the time we imagined that we were walking over bodies, dead and alive. We felt frightened and shuddered a little, but at that age we were eager to be frightened—this same eagerness sometimes drove us to sneak a look behind the dump's arches. I thought about the day when I stopped meeting Ayaz for some time. We had played hooky from school that day. Bored from roaming around our favorite haunts, we went to the Garbage Dump and stomped over piles of trash all the way up to the arches. I was standing near the middle arch when Ayaz stuck his head into the first arch and then pulled it back immediately saying in a muffled voice, "There's somebody inside."

Fear and curiosity both enticed me to go over to that arch. But when I pushed him aside to peek in myself, Ayaz suddenly grabbed my legs from behind and jerked them up in such a way that I was plunged up to my waist, or perhaps the whole of me, into the trash behind the arch.

"Well, now you have to stay here forever," Ayaz said. Then I heard his frightened laugh, the sound of his running feet, and the echo of heavy vehicles as they moved along the highway.

Suddenly I realized that I was standing idly in front of the Garbage Dump, oblivious of Beg Sahib's death. I climbed up the wet stairs of the lane to the highway. It seemed as if it was going to rain soon. I started to feel even colder thinking that I would have to sit out in the open at Beg Sahib's. But I crossed the highway and descended into the lanes on the other side and soon found myself at Beg Sahib's house.

The body had already arrived and the lane was filled with people, including not only our own office staff but also the staffs from other offices of the administration.

3

On the fourth day I went to Beg Sahib's home to return his briefcase. I used to go there even before I was employed because Ayaz used to live there. But back then I stood at the door and called him out. We would then go for long walks and when we returned I would say goodbye to him, again at the door, and leave for my own home. If at either of these times we spotted Beg Sahib coming along, we vanished quickly. Ayaz used to fear him, and, following Ayaz's lead, so did I. By the time I entered my youth, my fear of him had lessened considerably. Likewise my interaction with Ayaz had also become much less. He hardly ever visited me at my home even back then. Most of the time it was I who went to his place. But after I went to see him quite a few times and was told each time that he was out somewhere, I stopped going. At that time I didn't yet know that he had disappeared. Later Beg Sahib came to my house several times to ask me about him. It was through him that I first learned that Ayaz had gone away somewhere without telling anybody. Beg Sahib also suggested that Ayaz had gone to live elsewhere of his own accord. I clearly remember that he never once mentioned the Garbage Dump during his inquiry. It was I who told him that back when we were boys Ayaz used to go there with me to watch the trash piling up. But Beg Sahib showed no interest in this information. Instead he began to ask me about some of Ayaz's other acquaintances. Beg Sahib didn't continue coming to our house for long. Perhaps he had guessed our financial condition in just a few days. After his last visit, he gave me a temporary job in his office. With the office staff his attitude was strictly professional, which

they regretted somewhat. However with me he didn't just talk about work. The staff knew that I was a friend of Ayaz and had been frequenting Beg Sahib's house since childhood, so they understood his special treatment of me. Sometimes my coworkers also quizzed me about Ayaz. But, after hiring me, Beg Sahib never again brought up Ayaz with me, in fact he never even mentioned his name once. Three days ago he had again mentioned his name. The first time, though, he had stopped right after he started. And now, today, it was the fourth day after his death, and I was standing on his veranda with his briefcase in my hand.

I was given a seat in the same outer room Beg Sahib had used as an office. I had been in this room several times before. Whenever a lot of work descended on the office suddenly, Beg Sahib would ask me to come over to his house to help him expedite it. He looked more like an officer at home than he did at the office. I used to feel reticent talking with him here, although I was treated with hospitality. At least twice while we worked Beg Sahib's wife sent tea and other things for us, and sometimes she brought the tea over herself. She was a simple homemaker. Now and then she engaged in formal conversation with me. The trace of affection in her tone, although perhaps natural and meant for everyone, somehow seemed to be exclusively for me, and I considered it a godsend compared to Beg's Sahib's dryness. She was acquainted with some women who were distant relatives of mine and she talked mostly about them. Until now, I didn't know that she was, in fact, the same Hajira Begam who worked for social causes in the city. I found this out only two days ago from the local newspapers where the news of Beg Sahib's death was printed under the headline: **LOSS TO HAJIRA BEGAM: HUSBAND DIES SUDDENLY.**

I used to see Hajira Begam mentioned often in the newspapers. She belonged to many women's organizations and reports of their activities appeared frequently. Occasionally a statement by her on some women's issue also found its way in, but without much fanfare.

At this moment I was sitting in Beg Sahib's office-like room, with his briefcase in front of me, waiting for Hajira Begam. I could have brought the briefcase over earlier, but the way the newspaper had headlined the news of Beg Sahib's death made me feel that the proper way would be to first send Rahmatullah to his house to ask for an appointment.

Hajira Begam entered the room quietly. She sat down in Beg Sahib's chair even before I could stand up. I wondered, feeling somewhat surprised, why I had thought she appeared to be just an ordinary housewife up until then. I pushed the briefcase toward her trying to think of what I

might say in sympathy at Beg Sahib's death. Just then she asked, "How did it all happen, Ghayas Mian?"

I gave her the same account I had told repeatedly to the office staff, and she listened with her head bowed. With her head still bowed she said, "He was late leaving for the office that day." Then she lifted her head and asked, "Was he able to get there on time?"

"Yes," I said. "He was never late."

"But that day he was unusually late leaving."

"He arrived exactly at the right time," I told her, then I clumsily offered my condolences on his death and assured her, still more clumsily, that he was a very good man. Hajira Begam listened inattentively to all of this and I thought that she must have heard similar things—but expressed more elegantly—for the past several days now. Feeling embarrassed by my superfluous expressions I thought I had better take my leave. I came up with a few parting sentences and said getting up, "The office was functioning very well because of him. But let's see ..."

Hajira Begam beckoned me to sit down and said, "Yes. He always worried about the office. If he ran late he started to become angry. That day too ...". She looked at me again, "Did he get there in time?"

I was feeling confused by this rather oblique conversation so I said, "Exactly on time. He took the lane to get there." Feeling that this too said nothing I told her, "Via the Garbage Dump."

She looked at me in silence for a while and then said, "That's the way he took every day."

"But not for some time now," I said. I was expecting her to say something equally indirect so I said, "He felt a slight chest pain whenever he stood in front of the Dump. Perhaps he told you that."

"No ... yes. He did say something like that one day. I thought he was just joking."

"For some time now whenever he came near the Dump he shuddered and a pain started in his chest ... so he began coming by way of the road instead."

Hajira Begam stared at me quietly. I remembered only one of the things I had thought up for taking my leave and I was about to forget that too, so I said without waiting for her response, "If there's anything I can do, I mean at the office."

I pushed the briefcase a bit more toward her and placed my hands on the desk. As I was getting up she said, "So the Garbage Dump killed him."

"Who can it kill, it looks dead itself."

"But then ... why when he got there ... when he got there ..."

I turned around at the door. "He thought Ayaz lived there. Inside the Garbage Dump."

I heard a protracted gasp and I turned toward Hajira Begam. Right before my eyes such dreadful shock swept across her face that she couldn't hide it in spite of being a social figure. She began to look like an ordinary housewife as she had earlier. I sat down again.

"Did he tell you about that?"

"He said very little at home." She uttered this in a tone that sounded partly disappointed and partly displeased. "And about Ayaz—hardly ever anymore. Did he say something to you?"

"No. Only about the Garbage Dump.... He was thinking of starting a lawsuit to claim ownership of it, wasn't he? He had me work on preparing the documents."

"He never breathed a word to me about it."

I approached the desk and said, placing my hand on the briefcase, "All the papers are here."

Hajira Begam opened and closed the fasteners of the briefcase for a while and then said, "It all happened so suddenly. Now these papers ... you've read them, haven't you?"

"No, I've only seen them. He wanted me to make a list of these papers."

"Have you seen all the papers?"

"Almost all, but ... I don't understand legal matters. Have a lawyer look at them."

"I do recall that a lawyer visited him from time to time; but I don't know whether it had to do with the office or ..."

She opened and closed the fasteners once more, glancing at me and then at the briefcase. I remembered Beg Sahib's death and said, "That day he had asked me to make a list of the papers. He'd already arranged them in separate files himself."

I lifted up the flap of the briefcase. Hajira Begam casually looked over the papers in a couple of files at the top and said helplessly, "I won't understand a thing."

"I'll make the list. But first you must find a lawyer ..."

"You would be wasting your time for nothing."

"Why 'for nothing'?" I said. "It ... in a way, was his will ..."

Hajira Begam became sad and said in a hoarse voice, "He trusted you a lot."

"He was very kind to me," I said getting up and walking toward the door. Hajira Begam said once again, "You'll be wasting your time."

"Not at all," I said, saying goodbye to her and stepping out. "I have plenty of time after office hours."

I, of course, meant that I wouldn't have the time for it during office hours.

Then I proceeded straight to the office where the first news that greeted me was that my term of employment had ended. Beg Sahib had had me appointed temporarily especially to help him out, and perhaps he had renewed my appointment at the end of each term. My salary, too, was not paid monthly, but daily. My coworkers, referring to specific legal requirements, began telling me what I needed to do to obtain a renewal, but I knew all too well that whatever was needed was beyond my ability to accomplish. Even so, I expressed my intention to act on their advice and, after completing my last formal office duties, returned home.

My family was rather large. Several members had jobs, but there were also quite a few mouths to feed. Alone, I made about as much as the other wage-earning members did jointly and this had begun to have its affect on the external appearance of our household. That's why I was now feeling that both my family and my life had fallen into the path of some cataclysmic change. I spent a few days feeling pretty awful. Finally I reasoned with myself actually the change was what had prevailed during the brief period of my temporary employment. The situation had now reverted to what it used to be. So it was like before. I accepted that, in fact, I accepted it so completely that before a month had passed I began to think of my office days as something that had occurred in dreams, so completely that I even forgot the faces of my coworkers. Even the face of Rahmatullah, whom I had seen the most, began to lose its clarity and fade, so, when he showed up at my house one day, I faltered as I said, "How are you ... Rahmatullah?"

He inquired after me in response, and, without my asking, began telling me about the office; namely, that it was functioning, but poorly, after Beg Sahib, and that he couldn't even get the new dust rag that Beg Sahib had already approved. Then he told me that he didn't like it there since I had left. At the very end he informed me that Hajira Begam wanted to see me.

"When?"

"She didn't say when. Shall I go find out?"

"Don't bother. Why make two trips?" I said. "Just tell her that I'll visit her tomorrow in the morning. But if she would rather see me at a different time, then come back and let me know when."

As soon as she saw me, Hajira Begam complained about my not having informed her of the termination of my job. Later she asked who had regular jobs in my family.

"And here I was thinking that it was because you had a heavier workload at the office after him that you didn't come here."

That's when I remembered about the list. "No," I said, "I just plain forgot. Otherwise the list would be ready by now."

"Ah yes, the list. Make it and be done with it."

She got up and went over to the cabinet by the wall, took out Beg Sahib's briefcase and placed it before me on the desk. I opened the flap, glanced at the files and asked, "Has a lawyer examined them yet?"

"No ... yes. He looked them over briefly. He also advised me to have a complete list drawn up first. He was saying that there are quite a few papers. The list will have to be fairly long."

"I'll make it ..." I stopped myself from saying "Sir" just in time. "I'll come here and make it."

"Well then, whenever you have time."

"I have all the time."

Hajira Begam became somewhat dejected and hesitated a little before she said, "Let me have your diplomas, etc., sometime."

Then she said that she usually stayed home till about noon and that I could start that very day if I wanted to.

I started work that very day.

4

Beg Sahib had prepared the files very neatly. I had seen nearly all the papers in them and I had copied many of the documents myself. As a rule, he not only read each document himself, he also had someone else—usually me—read it out loud to him. But since besides these papers, and in fact more than them, my work was with office papers, my knowledge about the former didn't extend beyond the fact that they contained a variety of information about and references to some building dating from royal times. I never asked him about the matter but one day he himself

told me in a casual way that that building had been gifted to his family and he was now trying to reclaim it.

Working in Beg Sahib's office-like room, I initially began drawing up the list for Hajira Begam or her attorney with some degree of interest, but the papers were of many types. Most of them were things that had been filed in Beg Sahib's own office. Besides these, there were certified copies of all kinds of petitions, official notices, court rulings, etc., probably none of them less than a hundred years old. After it was put in a file, each paper assumed the appearance of a legal document, which was beyond my ability to understand, so, without probing deeply into it, I merely picked up and recorded each item on the list I was compiling. Beg Sahib had written a number on each file and on each paper in it and had also given each of them a title. This made my job considerably easier. I concentrated mainly on making sure that I didn't miss entering a single paper on the list. Now and then my attention did wander off though. That happened because there was a steady stream of women coming to see Hajira Begam and, except for her, none of them could keep their voices down when they spoke. Although, when one woman would stop and another start, I did sometimes feel that the woman before her had been speaking rather softly. On occasion all of the women broke out laughing at the same time and then I was obliged to backtrack to check some entries. That didn't bother me much because in my previous employment I had become accustomed to making errors and then correcting them. I must admit, though, that to correct some entries while working at Beg Sahib's home I was obliged to peruse certain legal papers and I found this tedious and boring.

But one day, after I had finished work on several legal files, a file with "The Big Garbage Dump" written on it caught my eye. I opened it with great interest, but all it contained was just one paper with the addresses of some properties from the distant past copied on it. Each address invariably contained either the line "Adjacent to Big Garbage Dump" or "In front of Big Garbage Dump." This file disappointed me. A similar disappointment awaited me when I looked into another file with no serial number but with "Ayaz" written on it in pencil. This one contained an incomplete genealogy of some family, with Ayaz's name appearing at the end. It didn't even tell me as much as I already knew about Ayaz. Beg Sahib had told me earlier that Ayaz was the last surviving member of his family, and I already knew that Beg Sahib had raised him from childhood. I wondered for quite a while whether something useful about Ayaz might only exist in his family tree.

When I looked at the list, I discovered that I had skipped Ayaz's file and was recording items from the one after it. God knows how many other errors I had already made. That day Hajira Begam's women visitors were speaking unusually loudly and also laughing more than at any other time. From the dribblets of conversation that trickled into my ears, I surmised that Hajira Begam was out somewhere. Then I heard the clanking of teacups and such. I heard this noise at least twice during my hours working there. Each time it was followed shortly thereafter by a woman entering the room I was in through the door that was behind me. I would keep my eyes fixed on the file that was in front of me, while the woman, after placing a cup of tea near the other files, would quietly turn back on her heels. Sometimes, when Hajira Begam brought the tea over herself, she would tarry a little and talk about one or two things with me. I wasn't expecting any tea that day. I was also thinking that the house felt strangely still and quiet in her absence even though the women's noises were louder and sharper than before. In the midst of those loud noises I heard someone say, "Who will take the tea over?"

By then I was already busy counting the errors on my list, which seemed more numerous than usual. A short while later I heard the sound of a teacup being placed softly on the desk and I lost track of my count. I started all over again. Right after I began counting I heard an expressionless voice behind my back, "Why didn't you bring him along?"

"Him—who?" I blurted out, not thinking.

"Ayaz Bhai."

Then I turned around and looked at her, recognizing her after some uncertainty. "You're Shamima, aren't you?" I asked, and looked at her again. "Why, you've grown so big!"

My cordiality left her unaffected. She asked, again in an expressionless voice, "Please bring him from there, Ghayas Bhai."

"From where?"

"The Big Garbage Dump."

Is she still the way she used to be, I wondered to myself.

"Nobody can live in the Garbage Dump, Shamima."

"Why not? After all, you did, didn't you?"

Just then women's voices were heard outside on the veranda. Hajira Begam's was among them. Then she herself entered the room. Shamima, pausing briefly as she started to leave the room, told her, "I had brought tea."

"That's good," Hajira Begam said absentmindedly as she came and stood near the desk. After waiting a while for her to say something, I said, "I saw Shamima today for the first time in a long time."

Hajira Begam looked a bit anxious and quite tired. She glanced at the files on the desk and said, "You've done quite a lot of work."

"It's not a lot really. It's just making a list after all."

"Were you able to understand the papers?"

"These are legal matters. Lawyers would understand them."

Suddenly I began to tire of my work. I made an estimate of the remaining files and the papers in them and said, "Only a little work remains. If I stay longer I may be able to wrap it all up today."

"Are you sure you don't have other work to do?" she asked, then said on her own, "Yes, it would be nice if you finished it today. You can eat here."

"A cup of tea would be fine halfway through. I'm used to eating only once a day."

"People your age should eat three or four times a day," she commented. "OK, you work," and she left the room.

The remaining work was less than what I had guessed. Then, too, I hurried to finish it. At some point a woman servant came in with tea. It was completely quiet in the house. I asked her, "Is Begam Sahiba in?"

"She's been gone for quite a while now," she said as she was leaving.

I had finished compiling the list by mid-afternoon. I checked that day's entries against the papers in the files and also made sure the files were arranged in serial order. As I was putting the list on top of the files, the woman servant walked in, again with tea. She put the cup down on the desk and said, "Let me know when you're leaving."

"I've finished the work and I'm just getting ready to go," I said. "You may close the door now."

"At least drink the tea first," she said, picking up the earlier teacup, and then she left the room.

I was repeatedly reminded of Shamima as I was putting the files and the list into the briefcase. She was just a little girl when I used to visit Ayaz during our childhood. Sometimes when he and I went out for a stroll, she would ask to accompany us without showing the least bit of eagerness. In answer, Ayaz always said the same thing, "No. Your clothes will get dirty." While she stood quietly watching us walk away he would tell her that the two of us were headed to the Garbage Dump. When we returned she would often be found standing at the door and she never failed to ask what all we had seen. But without paying much attention to

our answer she just followed Ayaz into the house. The only things I knew about her were that she was Hajira Begam's sister, that she hung around Ayaz, and that she was a little weak in the head. She was absolutely fanatic when it came to wearing spotlessly clean clothes. We considered this to be the result of her mental weakness—a weakness that showed on her face when she expressed her desire to go along with us, and also when she had brought tea for me. Perhaps that's the reason I had recognized her.

Had she not been weak in the head, I could have asked her quite a few things. But what things?—I hadn't the foggiest idea. I strained my mind for quite some time until I experienced the same weariness I had experienced when I was making the list. The tea on the desk had turned cold. I gulped it down like water and left without letting the woman servant know.

5

Three or four days later Hajira Begam sent Rahmatullah to fetch me. That day her house was devoid of women's noises. Hajira Begam was seated in Beg Sahib's chait in the office-like room. She talked about this and that for quite a while. Then she hesitated just as she was about to say something, and said instead, "You've drawn up the list very neatly. The lawyer was full of praise."

"Has he examined the papers?"

"Yes. And so have I. But ..."

After that she spoke as if she was talking to herself. But everything she said was so convoluted that I really had to make my mind work very hard to understand it. All I could figure out was this: The legal proceedings would drag on for quite a while, and even then it would be difficult to prove who the Garbage Dump actually did belong to. While the building belonging to Beg Sahib's family was definitely there, in the opinion of the lawyer the Garbage Dump had undoubtedly been there earlier. The lawyer also felt that either Beg Sahib had not carefully examined the files he had prepared or he had also been preparing another file which he wanted to pull out without warning. Assuming that he had won the case after so much trouble and headache, what would Beg Sahib have done with a dilapidated *dalan* filled with garbage anyway? The lawyer was finding this hard to figure out, and so was Hajira Begam. Still worse, now the suit had to be brought to the court by Hajira Begam. Her remark, "Anything I say or do becomes the talk of the town," lingered in my

memory. Obviously, if the suit prepared by Beg Sahib were to be pursued further that would, no doubt, also attract a great deal of attention. And Hajira Begam would surely acquire a new nickname with "Garbage Dump" worked into it somehow. Exactly the same thing had happened with several well-known people in the city.

I was listening quietly. I remembered the absolutely bizarre nicknames tacked onto some of the city's prominent individuals and I immediately understood Hajira Begam's worry. Not just that, I also understood why she was telling me all this. So I said, "I've taken every precaution to insure that no one knows anything about this matter. I haven't even spoken to anyone at home about it."

"You did the right thing," she said. "Yes, the lawyer is of the same opinion: quash the matter where it now stands."

I concurred with what the lawyer said. Getting up, I was about to tell her that if, in the future, she needed my help in any matter, all she had to do was send Rahmatullah for me, but she beckoned for me to sit back down. She hesitated a bit, then, opening the desk drawer, she said in a tone as though she was addressing one of her own, "Ghayas Mian, refuse it only if you really want to hurt me." Then she pushed an envelope toward me.

Although the color in my face had perhaps changed a little, my hand moved forward as if by its own volition. Hajira Begam looked at me with downcast eyes and said, "Don't say another word." She looked even more downcast. "Think that you were working at the office for a while longer after him."

I sat tongue-tied, flipping the envelope back and forth. She too remained silent. Finally she said, "Do visit us now and then. Now that he's gone ... you don't know ..." and her voice gave way. When I lifted up my head after some time, she was already gone.

After going down the lane of stairs I came to a halt in front of the Garbage Dump. Eventually I continued on into the long lane and turned left. As usual, the lane was deserted and quiet, but not the kind of quiet that permeated the area around the Garbage Dump. Here it wasn't even broken by the loud shrill barking of dogs fighting among themselves. I remembered how, at the time I was getting Beg Sahib's papers ready, whenever I came to the Garbage Dump I stopped in front of it and I would sense some vague feeling in its silence, but I could never put it into words.

I turned around and once again went to stand in front of that dilapidated *dalan*. I looked at the trash that was lying there. Something resembling steam was rising from the rubbish underneath, and that vague feeling now seemed to be somewhat like anticipation. My roving eyes stopped at the inner arches and I stepped, somewhat carefully, on the pile of garbage. While trying to avoid stepping on several useful objects, and trying to avoid tripping on them myself in the process, I managed to get as far as the first arch. Then I stuck out my head.

It was just as it had always been: extremely old trash, decayed and disintegrating, extending upwards about the distance of a couple of arm lengths but unable to reach the highest serratures. The rubble that was used for the filler kind of soared upward behind it and, here and there, empty spaces were filled with the faint echo of vehicles as they moved along on the highway above. □

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